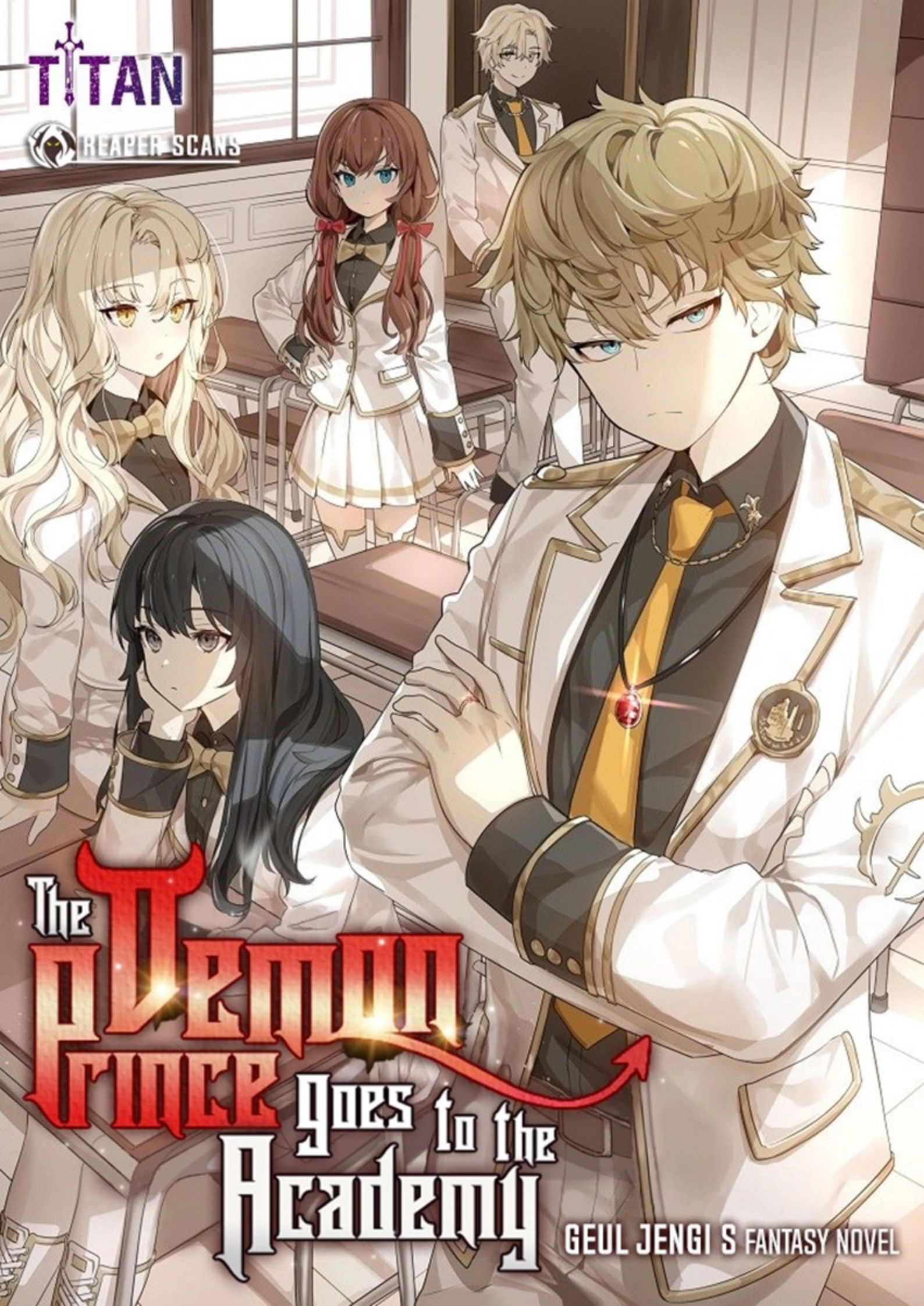

TITAN
REAPER SCANS
The Demon Prince goes to the Academy
GEUL JENGI S FANTASY NOVEL

THE DEMON PRINCE GOES TO THE ACADEMY

–마왕은 학원에 간다 –

- VOLUME 5 -

-AUTHOR-

Geul Jengi S

-ILLUSTRATOR-

RONOPU

[REAPER SCANS]

CHAPTER 201

When I finished my rough explanation, I felt rather surprised at the very different facial expressions the three of them showed.

First of all, I had proposed the creation of a joint club between Class A and B, who were like cats and dogs before.

Second, the one who proposed something like that, namely me, wasn't someone with a magic major, but someone completely ignorant of magic.

The proposal is amazing, but why are you the one making it?

I could feel them wanting to ask that question.

"That is what I had planned out. I will also join the club."

"But you're… A supernatural power user."

"Yes, I understand, but I…"

"Right…"

All three of them expressed their own doubts. Since the talk I brought up was related to creating a club, not some kind of scolding or something, the remaining anxiety within them seemed to have disappeared.

Because it wasn't Harriet but me who made the request, they didn't seem to understand what I'd be doing there. To be honest, it seemed rather difficult for me to participate in all of the activities.

"Yeah, there's nothing much I can do. I'll just be present. Just think of me as a kind of bridge. In other words, I'll be someone in charge of the chores."

"Chores?"

"You?"

"…You're lying."

No, why were those guys, who didn't even know me that well, looking at me as if to say "There's no way you'll do that" when I told them that I would take care of the chores?

I didn't know if anything would come up, but I'd most definitely do it. What else would I be able to do there? Did they want me to teach them magic circles or something? They should've just thought of me as a useless, decorative folding screen.

"Anyway, I think it's a good opportunity for you and the Class A kids. In the end, the key to all of this is you, Louis Ancton."

"…I should teach the others magic?"

I had already told them that Louis Ancton would teach the other students. Their reaction was quite something. All three of them had their mouths wide open and were like, "What nonsense are you talking about?!"

"I can't even use magic, so what kind of magic do you want me to teach them? I only study magic theory, but I can't put anything I learn into practice."

As he felt quite embarrassed for having to say something like that himself, Louis Ancton's face reddened. While he couldn't become a wizard, he still dreamed of becoming a magi.

But what magi didn't want to be a wizard?

They were people who completely understood the principle behind magic with their heads but couldn't actually put their knowledge to practical use. As such, Louis Ancton must've certainly felt resentful and frustrated that he was unable to use magic.

That was why his face went all red when he said something like that—he felt some kind of repulsion towards himself.

"Why not? I heard there are a lot of amazing spells that have been created by magi. According to Harriet, there are as many great people among the magi as there are among wizards."

That was what I'd heard from Harriet.

When I carefully laid out how I could tell Louis Ancton to teach others about magic, I found out there were actually cases like that.

That was what happened, after all.

Louis Ancton, who couldn't use magic, had actually greatly succeeded in improving the magic skills and ranks of spells of the other students in the original.

That was why there was a background setting that even magi were more than capable of teaching wizards.

According to Harriet, some of the greatest magi had actually accomplished far more than any archmage and were held in high regard.

When I said that there was nothing a great magi wouldn't be able to teach a wizard, he shook his head.

"That's true… but…"

I could feel that he appreciated my words.

A magi who couldn't use magic had to live with the fate of someone born with a plastic spoon in their mouth.

I'd heard that among wizards the enchanter and magic crafter jobs were seen as high-ranking, while Battle Mages had lost their places in the job market.

However, he wasn't a battle mage or any kind of wizard, he was a magi.

Even if they didn't do anything wrong, the scorn they would earn from scholars and wizards would be immense.

However, depending on their achievements, they could also become even greater figures than archmages and leave big marks in the world of magic's history.

Louis Ancton was still a student. The reason why that guy grew so twisted and looked down on and ignored anyone who was less intelligent than him was he had nothing else he could trust other than his intellect.

On the inside, he was a mess of indignation, resentment, and frustration because he was unable to use magic.

So while his self-esteem seemed to be incredibly high, it was actually really low.

Louis Ancton, B-2, owner of an academic talent.

“Can I… really do it?”

I folded my arms and frowned at his words.

“Who else but you would do it?”

“Huh?”

“If not you, who else would be able to do something like this? I’m sure you’re the only one who is capable of this. If you don’t believe me, you can just try it for this semester. If it doesn’t work, I’ll crawl through your legs like a dog.”

“H-huh? Y-you’d do that?”

Not only did his expression become brighter at my show of determination, but the people who were listening were also shocked.

“Fuck, why would I have to do something like that?”

“Wh-what do you mean?”

“There’s no fucking way it won’t work out. You punk.”

If things didn’t work out, I would crawl through Louis Ancton’s legs like a dog, but I had no intention of actually doing that.

—Because there was no fucking way that it wouldn’t work out.

Louis Ancton’s expression turned a little strange when he witnessed my wild conviction.

It showed something other than joy, sadness, or any other emotion.

He looked like it was the first time in his life that someone had recognized him.

* * *

We still had a long discussion after that, but in the end, they all gave their okays.

Louis Ancton, who felt inferior to wizards, seemed to hold a lot of expectations of being able to actually teach magic to wizards.

So, while he didn't seem to believe in what I told him for the moment, he was willing enough to at least give it a try.

Christina, who had a pretty cheerful personality, said something along the lines of, "It sure looks fun if that's how it is," and "I'll join you."

She slightly scratched her cheek as she gave her consent.

"Actually, I was a little scared. I wondered if I'd crossed you in some way."

"No, you didn't do anything like that."

"That's true, but…"

At first, she seemed a little tense, but Christina's expression quickly brightened when she realized that I held no ill will towards her and actually wanted to request something.

That bastard Reinhardt is calling me? Did I do anything to that guy?

Now that I thought of it, when Louis, Anna, and Christina all came in they wore the same expression. They seemed to think something like "Who annoyed that lunatic this time? Is he trying to blame us this time?"

However, in the end, I wasn't looking for them for that reason.

"I completely misunderstood you."

"…Most of the things you know about me aren't misunderstandings, but I'm not the kind of guy who would beat up others for no reason."

“Is… is that so…?”

It was true… None of the facts they knew about me were wrong…

It was just that I wouldn’t hit anyone who didn’t actually do something first!

“By the way, Reinhardt, you aren’t a wizard, right? You said that Louis would teach us magic, but why would you recommend creating such a club for us?”

That was a valid question. I wasn’t even that close to those three. I’d only talked to Louis a bit at most. While we did see each other often, that was as good as our first meeting.

They asked a similar question to Harriet, after all.

"Do I need a specific reason? What’s bad about trying something that could benefit you, right? You guys might end up improving because of my suggestion. Let’s say you buy me a meal later if all works out, hm?”

“…A meal? That’s all you want?”

Was a meal too little to ask for?

"Well, if you want to give me money, I'd take that as well. I do like money, after all.”

Louis and Christina grinned, knowing that I was just joking.

‘Yeah, you got it now, you guys? I wouldn’t do that stuff for no reason. I’m not the type of dog that bites others if they don’t touch me first, got it?’ That was why I was living calmly.

Anna looked at me as she nodded silently.

“You… were a good guy…”

“…Huh?”





* * *

Anna was smiling at me as she was talking.

What was with her?

Why was I getting goosebumps from her looking at me with that smile?

While Dettomolian simply seemed gloomy, Anna had a similar vibe about her, and yet it was slightly different.

Should I call it dreary? Feeling like there were cold shivers running down my spine, I tried taking control of the conversation again.

“Anyway, all of you agreed to participate. Then let’s get together and talk about the details.”

Some might have said “See you in a few days” in that situation, but I wanted to get things done as quickly as possible. So I said, “Let’s get together today to plan out how we are going to move forward from this point on and decide on what research projects you would pursue.”

One semester wasn’t that much time, after all.

* * *

We had no specific plans for the club yet, and Harriet was of the opinion that we should figure things out once we all met up and talked.

So once I persuaded the three students from Class B, I left the dormitory, just as Harriet and Adelia left Class A’s.

We could have had our talk in the dormitory, but to switch things up, we decided to go out to the cafe alley not too far from our classroom building.

As we arrived at the cafe, there were a total of six people seated around a large table, myself included.

A-4 Harriet de Saint-Owan. [Talent : Magic]

A-7 Adelia. [Talent : Summoning Magic, Magic Crafting]

A-11 Reinhardt. [Talent : Self-suggestion, Mana Sensitivity] (Useless)

B-2 Louis Ancton. [Talent : Studying]

B-5 Christina. [Talent : Enchantment, Alchemy]

B-6 Anna de Gerna. [Talent : Black Magic]

All of the first-year students with magic-related talents and one teacher were gathered there.

There was also one useless person.

We sat around the table with our ordered drinks before us.

"…"

—In silence.

No one was saying anything. All of them were sipping on their drinks, but no one uttered even a single word.

They were all trying to read the room.

"What? Why are you staring at me?"

They were only looking at me.

Of course, they didn't seem scared or intimidated by me.

All their expressions seemed to shout, "Just say something!"

No, I was just a useless person. Someone in charge of chores. I hadn't actually planned on joining at first, but Harriet had whined that she wanted me to join, so she came up with the idea that we'd create it together!

I did have some responsibility for bringing up the idea, so I bit the bullet, but suddenly I also had to play host?

I was the least suitable person present to do something like that, but all of them were just looking at me.

Harriet was only close to the Class A girls. Of course, one could also say that she was rather close to me, though I feel like I was the first one to approach her.

I mean, that girl also wasn't really the sociable type.

Then there was Adelia.

The word that best described her was, 'coward'. If she were to become the center of attention, her blood pressure would go through the roof.

Louis Ancton…

While he was smart, he was pretty much a snarky guy. He also didn't know how to properly socialize with other people.

Christina…

Although she was a pretty lively girl, she seemed rather nervous having the two Class A magic majors sitting before her.

Anna…

Scary! Don't look at me with those gloomy eyes of yours!

Yeah, let's not mention Anna.

No…

But if one looked at me as a character as well, wasn't I just as bad?

I should've been the least sociable one there, right? How could they look at me like that, asking the guy who'd let his fists speak first to lead the conversation, even after they all heard the rumors going around that I was a twisted bastard? Shouldn't I be the last person to ask to do something like that?

I wasn't sure if my having brought up this whole thing also meant that I had to take full responsibility for it as well.

“I wanted you guys to get together and talk about your personal views, desires, direction and so regarding magic, but with how things are going now, all of you will just end up finishing your drinks and then go back to the dorm to sleep.”

I wanted them to talk freely among themselves, but they’d left the stage to me, who had nothing to do with magic.

“Anyway, all of you already know the gist of this. I think Louis Ancton here has the qualities of an excellent magi. Of course, that is not all, you can also freely select a research topic and work on it in your own way, or something like that. Or you might be able to solve some of the problems you are struggling with right now by acquiring knowledge of other fields of magic. While I have no clue about magic, I do know that if I struggle with something, I often find the answer to my problems in completely unexpected places.”

I wasn’t sure if they had concepts similar to “Confluence” or “Convergence” in magic, but knowledge was power, right?

“So, you do know that all of you will be part of a Magic Research Club, right? I wanted you guys to talk things through and discuss if you really want to do it or not… If all of you are acting like this, we won’t get anywhere, guys.”

Let’s decide after a lively discussion about magic with each other! No! I don’t want to join!

Far from coming to that conclusion, those guys were far too shy to utter a single word.

I didn’t have the ability to lead a debate about magic.

Everyone seemed to gesture for me to do something about the situation, so I just had to do whatever, I guess.

-Slap!

I pounded on the table.

“Are you gonna join or not? Those who won’t, raise their hands.”

Everyone opened their eyes wide, staring at me, at my sudden declaration asking for

a show of hands.

“No one? In that case, it’s decided then. You’ll join.”

Confused at my sudden suggestion to vote and hurriedly concluded it like that. Harriet stared at me in astonishment as I concluded it so quickly that none of them had the chance to voice their opinion.

“H-huuh? Hey! How could you just decide that so suddenly? We still need to talk…”

“Then tell me, who was it that looked at me like a bunch of kids who didn’t have a clue as to what to say and couldn't come up with a solution until just now?”

“Th-that’s…!”

"Then let’s have a very lively discussion about magic research then. Yes?”

“Th-that’s just…”

Harriet blushed when I told her to immediately start the discussion, and while she trembled, she didn’t say anything.

“If you don’t want me to hurry the process, start the discussion now.”

It wasn’t only Harriet, but all of them, as if they had become mute, they didn’t say a single thing.

Yeah, what normal person would just go, “Yeah, sure” when told to suddenly start a discussion?

So I suggested a show of hands.

Usually, more people wouldn’t raise their hands than raise them in those kinds of votes.

So if one wanted something to get passed, it was better to suggest those who were against it to raise their hands instead of the people who were for it.

Because they didn’t want to stand out weirdly, they wouldn’t raise their hands—that was just how humans were.

That was why I said that those who wanted to join shouldn't raise their hands, and those that didn't should.

Ah, no one raised their hands, so it was unanimous. Done. No redoes.

"Anyway, we already decided to go through with it. You decided you would do it, but now you wanna bail or say you can't do it? Huh?"

'You left the speaking to me, so now you have to pay the price for not doing anything.'

"I was just… telling you how it is."

Being perceived as some kind of delinquent sure was advantageous. Every time a topic came up that I didn't like, I could just act like that to suppress it quickly.

Although all of them went there to talk, they were forced to form the club because they didn't actually talk. Everyone was looking at me with a puzzled expression.

—Except for one person.

"But…"

"…Huh? What? Got something to say?"

Anna de Gerna showed me an eerie smile.

"Who'll be… the club president, then?"

"President?"

Right.

A club needed a president and a teacher in charge. For a Royal Class Club, six people were quite a lot, so would they just assign us a teacher?

While we didn't really need a vice president, we did need a president, as we had six members.

Anna seemed to think that we needed to decide who would be in charge of the club because we had decided that we were going to go through with it.

…But why did she keep looking at me?

"…What?"

It wasn't only Anna who looked at me, the others did as well.

"No. Seriously, that can't be right."

Don't say anything weird, you punks.

Whether we called it the Magic Research Club or Magic Research Society, it would be a magic-related club.

Shit.

You're fucking kidding, right?

I was just someone who'd be in charge of chores, someone completely useless. There was nothing else for me to do in that club.

Being a club president was a huge responsibility. And of course, the president had to be able to use magic.

If anything club-related came up, I would be called to various places, have to talk to teachers when we needed to get permission for something, and I might have some run-ins with the student council. There were so many things to do, so I, who was only in charge of chores…

Ah…

Huh?

Weren't those chores?

Harriet looked at me with a satisfied smile decorating her face.

She was planning something.

That look…

“Those who don’t want Reinhardt to be president, raise your hands!” Harriet shouted.

“Me!”

I was the only one who raised his hand.

I…

I became the president of the Magic Research Club while being completely unable to use even a bit of magic.

CHAPTER 202

Sunday…

The Imperial Palace, Emperatos.

Charlotte sat on a sofa in the Emperor's office, dressed in court robes.

"…"

And opposite of Charlotte sat Bertus, who was also dressed in such a robe.

The two of them were waiting for the Emperor, so it was just the two of them in that spacious office at the moment.

They hadn't gathered there because something big had happened. The Emperor would just call them to come to that place periodically. His purpose was to hear from his children how they were doing in Temple. Acting like any other parent, he was just checking on if his children were doing well.

Of course, the only little difference was that if those children weren't under strict orders directly from the Emperor, one of them would have surely ended up dying or completely destroyed.

There was no conversation between them, as they weren't exactly on good terms. If they made eye contact, only unpleasant things would leave their mouths.

However, there was one topic that wouldn't cause any more hate between them.

"Reinhardt plans on setting up stores in every mana train station?"

To be precise, that topic was Reinhardt.

Bertus liked Reinhardt, even though he had a really dirty temper, as he still was someone who'd do whatever he had to do, and he'd actually showed quite a good performance during the group mission, and although he didn't seem to have much ambition, he properly displayed his greed when he had to, that was why he liked

him. In fact, Bertus actually helped him out and overlooked various things.

A good example would be that he overlooked that he'd got close to Charlotte de Gardias, who was in Class B and his direct competitor, as someone from Class A. Bertus actually didn't say anything to Reinhardt about that matter.

In fact, both of them had tried hard to find Reinhardt in their own ways when he had disappeared.

Anyway, Reinhardt was a common point both Charlotte and Bertus shared.

Bertus had something to suggest to the Emperor that day, so he tried to shut up Charlotte before she could ruin it, telling her that it was Reinhardt who planned all that, not him.

The content of that suggestion was to set up shops in all the numerous mana train stations throughout the capital. The current train stations only contained facilities to carry out their function as stations, meaning boarding and departure points and ticket booths.

The history of mana trains wasn't that long yet that people had thought about how they could use the empty space.

However, then Reinhardt came along, saying that he wanted to utilize it.

"To be precise, Reinhardt only made the suggestion, the actual owners would be the Rotary Gang."

"Why are you helping him with that?"

Bertus grinned at Charlotte's question about why he was helping Reinhardt.

"We're going to share the profit. 90/10."

"90%? You're a bastard, you know?"

Charlotte was so sure that Bertus was such a bastard that she just casually believed him to do something like that.

Of course, he was a bastard—from Charlotte de Gardias' standpoint, that is. Bertus

slightly opened his mouth in disbelief.

“…Sister, I know you hate me quite a lot, but don’t that’s a bit much? How could I take 90%?”

“…Really? Isn’t that quite unexpected?”

“I know that I’m someone who lacks faith and trust, but I still have my business ethics.”

“Oh my, I’m surprised that you know that much, and even more surprised that you didn’t fix that part of you even though you know.”

“My dear sister, you aren’t much different from me, so why are you like this?”

It seemed that sparks were flying between them, as they were staring at each other.

“Anyway, this isn’t my business venture, it was Reinhardt’s proposal, so if it doesn’t pass through, it’ll be Reinhardt, not me, who will suffer, so I want you to give me a break and not uselessly cause problems.”

“Well, fine. It’s none of my business, but I didn’t know that you cared so much for Reinhardt.”

At Charlotte’s slightly sarcastic smile, Bertus took a sip from his tea, signaling that it was nothing big.

“My sister’s precious person is also precious to me, after all.”

These words seemed meaningless, but actually contained countless messages, some couldn’t even be recognized.

The precious person of one’s enemy was also precious to oneself.

The first and last precious in that phrase held two completely different meanings.

However, Charlotte’s expression was calm, even after hearing those words. Not even a single emotion could be read from Charlotte’s perfect poker face.

"So you think so as well?”

At Charlotte’s words declaring that she was just like him, Bertus smiled.

"What? So we value him only as each other’s precious person?”

“So what? What about it?”

Neither of them revealed how and why they were helping and caring for Reinhardt.

The only thing that remained was the result.

Reinhardt was basically stuck between Charlotte and Bertus. That might be favorable for him for the moment, but it wouldn’t be like that forever.

In a version of the world’s most dangerous tightrope walk, Reinhardt had to continuously look out for his own life

With that, the talk about Reinhardt came to an end. Once again, silence spread between Charlotte and Bertus for a long stretch of time. Those two didn’t talk with each other that much to begin with, and even if they did, they only had some veiled, pointed comments towards each other.

Charlotte was the first to break their long silence.

Her expression was obviously quite grim, and it was clear that she was about to force herself to say something she actually didn’t want to talk about.

“Hey…”

“…What now?”

“It greatly irks me that you are the only one I can ask about this, so let me ask you a question.”

“…If this is about the ongoing mining rights issue, I don’t have anything to say to you. You didn’t actually think I would answer if my competitor asked me about those things, right?”

That was all Charlotte could possibly ask him, so Bertus shot her down, as he had no intentions of telling her anything. Charlotte clicked her tongue and folded her arms to Bertus's act of cutting her off like that.

“It’s not about that.”

“If it’s about the issue with the Merchants Guild, I keep telling you that they have nothing to do with me. Of course, if Reinhardt gets those business rights, I think I might get involved a bit, technically, it would be Reinhardt…”

“I’m pretty enough, right?”

“…?”

At Charlotte’s unexpected, completely uncharacteristic question, Bertus’s thoughts froze for a moment.

Did I hear wrong? I heard wrong, right?

Bertus had clearly heard her question, but he came to the conclusion that he must have heard wrong because Charlotte couldn’t have asked something like that. There was no reason for her to ask him something like that.

Charlotte frowned as she looked at Bertus, who didn’t answer her even though he clearly heard what she’d asked.

“…Why are you silent? You should answer when people ask you something.”

“…Huh? What did you say again?”

Bertus eventually decided to confirm once again what her question was.

Charlotte sighed with her arms still crossed, seeming annoyed that she had to say such things herself.

"What I mean is, am I not attractive enough?”

“…Wh-what? Wh-what’s wrong with you all of a sudden?”

When he confirmed that he hadn’t misheard, Bertus turned ghostly pale.

What’s with her?

What is she trying to do this time?

Bertus was gripped by a serious type of fear he had never felt before in his life. His head was about to burst because of the unpredictable context and purpose Charlotte's question held.

Bertus was actually terrified because Charlotte had suddenly made such an unpredictable move. Charlotte just frowned at Bertus's sudden hesitant behavior.

"Are your ears clogged? Just tell me straight, I'm pretty enough, right?"

"Why… Just why would you ask me something like that?"

Bertus couldn't figure out why his half-sister and competitor who he was fighting against was asking him if he thought that she was pretty or not.

"You're the only one I can ask, okay? The maids, like parrots, would only spout rhetoric like, "You're as radiant as the sun like always." My people aren't any different. As far as I know, you are the only person who would give me an honest answer to this question. It's fine if you criticize me or mix in some malicious comments, so just say something."

Charlotte obviously lived among people who, when asked for their opinion on something like that, would only give answers they thought she wanted to hear, regardless of the truth.

That was why she got the idea that she would be able to get a proper answer if she asked someone who hated her.

Bertus didn't really know what that was about, but he could tell that Charlotte didn't have some other kind of purpose by asking that question.

"Hmm… Sister. You're attractive enough."

"Well, I guess I was rig—"

"Among fish, that is."

"…What?"

Bertus grinned with his arms folded.

"Sister, didn't you know that your mug resembles a fish's more than a human's?"

Of course, that was just a malicious comment, but Bertus actually saw Charlotte's face distort as she smiled bitterly.

"Mug? Did you just say mug?"

"It'll be fine, sister. I'm sure there's a good mate for you among the fish. Looking carefully, I do think your face looks pretty good in that case."

"Are you done talking? Do you want me to kill you now?"

The more hateful the words coming out of Charlotte's mouth were, the bigger Bertus's grin grew.

"Hey, I answered your question honestly. That's what I think, so what did I do wrong? Oh, and if you pull that face, your mug looks more like a deep sea fish than just a normal fish, you know?"

"Alright. Shut up. It's my fault for asking you."

Charlotte turned her eyes towards the window as if trying to distract herself.

Seeing Charlotte's angry expression, Bertus grinned widely.

Of course, he wondered why his half-sister had suddenly asked him if she was attractive or not, but Bertus couldn't figure out the reason.

* * *

Sunday…

Charlotte had returned from the Imperial Palace. The day before, she'd asked Bertus a rather worthless question, and it was obvious that no matter what she asked that guy, she would only receive malicious answers, but she still felt bad hearing them.

Fish?

A Fish?

It was such an unexpected insult that she felt like her face was about to explode.

It was rather hard to look at oneself objectively, but Charlotte really thought that she was definitely attractive. She even believed that it was a pretty modest assessment as well. She wasn't like her maids who habitually called her things like the shining goddess of beauty.

She could tell just by looking at herself. Just a single glance in a mirror was enough to see that she was so lovely and beautiful that it was shocking.

Well…

I'm pretty enough, right?

I don't know if my looks are the best there are, but I'm still sure that I look pretty good.

It was enough for her to have some faint, modest confidence in her looks.

And yet, Reinhardt, that guy, had jumped up, displeased at the prospects of marrying her?

She just thought of him as a good guy who helped her out quite a bit, but that scratched her pride quite a bit.

What was there to complain about, marrying someone like me who has money, power, ability, and beauty? Did he think that there was someone on this continent that had any better prospects than me?

Charlotte gradually started to get self-conscious about the fact there actually was someone out there who had better prospects and abilities than herself.

Who might that be?

I have never thought about it, but is there actually someone out there that is far beyond me?

Those things were not something she should worry about too much just because of some guy she didn't even like in that way, but she couldn't help but feel bad.

Charlotte believed that she was charming, no doubt, but for the first time in her life,

she was contemplating her own existence.

That wasn't all…

The Rotary Gang's new project…

Mana trains were one of the most important technologies that were almost equivalent to warp gates inside the Imperial Captial. She agreed that setting up stores in the stations was a pretty good idea.

However, that wasn't the problem.

Why did he ask Bertus and not me? I'm also the daughter of the Emperor, so he could have asked me to get his permission as well.

It wasn't something only Bertus was capable of.

While they didn't see each other every day and didn't always get along that well, she still thought that their relationship was close enough that they could share secrets they wouldn't be able with anyone else with each other.

However, he'd still consulted Bertus instead of herself for something as important as that.

Why?

Did Bertus seem more reliable and capable than her?

Obviously, Reinhardt did declare that he would stick to both her and Bertus, acting like a double agent, which Charlotte thought was ridiculous.

So he worked hard to look good to both Bertus and herself.

Bertus was in the same class, so he could talk to him easier and ask for favors like that—she understood that.

She understood it…

But she still got mad.

Why did he tell Bertus and not me?

Does he actually hate me?

When her thoughts reached that point, Charlotte stopped in her steps.

Charlotte couldn't help but stand there in a daze as she was about to enter the Royal Class' Dormitory.

Reinhardt might actually hate me.

She'd forced Reinhardt to accompany her in her search for that boy when she found out that he knew things that he shouldn't have.

Reinhardt didn't cooperate with her out of his own will, but he just obeyed her when she asked him to cooperate.

He only reluctantly worked for her because the lives of the Rotary Gang's members were at stake to begin with.

He only acted because he had no other choice but to do her bidding, and in reality, he might have been reluctant to do those things. He might fear that if his secret got leaked or discovered he might disappear without anyone knowing.

That secret…

No one would actually want to get to know something like that.

In the end, her own circumstances were just that, her own circumstances.

That was the first time Charlotte realized…

She had always only used Reinhardt. She'd never wondered how he felt about things or what his thoughts were and how much she was actually pressuring him.

She really felt grateful and thankful for his help, even though the tasks she made him

do were always accompanied by such danger.

However, that was it.

Reinhardt sympathized with my situation, my plight, and my sorrow; that was why he was helping me. That was what I had always thought…

However, Reinhardt was actually reluctant to cooperate, crushed by the weight of her authority. He wasn't actually worried about her at all. He might have only begrudgingly dealt with her as well.

She was so selfish.

Reinhardt might actually be more comfortable with Bertus than her.

—Because Bertus wouldn't ask Reinhardt to do anything dangerous like her.

That was what Charlotte realized, leading to her standing there in a daze for quite a long time.

* * *

Charlotte headed to Class A's dormitory without even knowing what she should tell Reinhardt. She felt like she had to apologize. But how? She had no idea what she should say.

I'm sorry for making you feel pressured.

I'm sorry for taking it for granted that you would take such risks.

You don't have to do something like bring me letters anymore.

But how would she get in touch with the kid then?

Charlotte couldn't even ask her own people to do those things. Those guys couldn't even find any clues to the whereabouts of the boy while she'd immediately found a lead when she was investigating with Reinhardt.

Only Reinhardt knew that truth because she wanted as few people as possible to know about it.

However, Dyrus and her own people had already changed their perception of the boy.

They had judged that he might be the only lead to solve her condition, so they had stopped the search.

If she wanted Reinhardt to stop doing dangerous things, she would have to stop sending letters through him.

However, then the only link she had with the boy would be lost. She would forever be cut off from the feelings that got conveyed to her through the letters.

Only by continuing to use Reinhardt for her own selfish reasons could the link with the boy be kept alive. He had to continue to expose himself to all that pressure and danger.

I'm grateful to Reinhardt, but I don't think it would be fair to him to make him keep doing this just for my gratitude.

What… What should I do?

This is something I really don't want to lose.

However at that rate, she would have to keep sacrificing someone else's safety for herself. She might even continue to sacrifice those who treated her with goodwill that actually came out of hostility, until one day they might truly get sacrificed.

Charlotte continued to head to Class A's dormitory still not knowing what she should say.

The voice that had become more than familiar to her by then, was ringing in the hallway. She knew who it was, even though she couldn't actually see his face.

-No seriously, hey. You idiot! Why should I do that?

-We've already decided! Hmpf! And even if you call me an idiot, I won't feel mad at all? You know why? Because you're even more pissed off, you know?

-Sure, idiot.

-Sure, president.

-I am not the president?! I'M NOT! No! I won't! I won't do it!

-… Ah, so this is how it feels, huh? I-I might get why you always tease me. What's it called again? Tra, tra-something? Trading blows? I heard that's what it's called. Right, Mr. President? I'll be in your care going forward.

-Aaaaaah! I'm really not doing it! Please, spare me!

-How could I, a mere member, make such a decision, Mr. President?

-I told you already that I won't be the president!

"…"

What is this?

When Charlotte heard Reinhardt fighting with someone, she wondered whether her worries were rather stupid.

Was I mistaken…?

Was he not burdened by any of that?

He seems to be living a happy everyday life in Temple, feeling no pressure, nor tension, nor fear about anything, right?

-I beg you! Please! Anything but that. Hm? Give me something else to do. It's a pain! You get it? A pain in the ass! I'm also busy, you know?!

-You said you'll be in charge of the chores, so aren't you supposed to do all the

chores, including being the president? You promised, didn't you?

-That's not what I promised!

Charlotte somehow lost all her strength, letting her shoulders sink, trudging back to Class B's dormitory.

However, Charlotte's heavy heart didn't grow lighter so quickly.

I've put this off for much too long.

It's time that I make a decision on these things I had held back for such a long time.

I think I really need to organize my thoughts now.

That was what Charlotte thought.

CHAPTER 203

Monday…

I stopped by the teacher's office after our common classes for the day were over in the classroom building where we had our common classes.

"…What is this?"

"Well, this… It's a club application form… Yeah."

"I know that."

Mr. Epinhauser narrowed his eyes when he saw the piece of paper I had handed him. Even that guy, who rarely showed any emotions on his face, reacted to that.

"If my eyes aren't playing tricks on me, it says 'Magic Research Society'."

"That's right."

"And the president is Royal Class Year 1 Class A's Number 11, Reinhardt."

"Yes."

"However, as far as I know, you are a supernatural power user with an auxiliary ability called 'Self-Suggestion', and you are currently getting trained in close combat."

"Indeed."

The teacher lowered the application form for creating our new club, placed it on his desk, sat down on his chair, and looked up at me.

"…"

"…"

Mr. Epinhauser didn't say anything, and neither did I.

It was really scary when he just stared at me like that. After staring into Mr. Epinhauser's eyes, who was believed to be able to kill anyone with just his eyes, I felt kind of suffocated.

Mr. Epinhauser had helped me out with various things in my first semester because I hadn't really known what to do.

'I bet what he wants to say is something like "You even want to dabble in magic now? Are you crazy?"'

"Teacher, please just say something."

It was scarier if he just continued to stare at me.

"I hope you aren't out of your mind."

"I'm completely sane. Yes."

It seemed like Mr. Epinhauser's patience also had limits. He glared at me, pressed down on a corner of his eyes, and spoke his next words as if vomiting them out.

"Then explain."

If it had been a normal incident like before, he wouldn't have shown that kind of reaction.

No…

Actually, those incidents themselves were supposed to be unusual enough already. I guess they were normal for me, though.

If I couldn't give him a proper explanation, I felt like I would really get hit.

Did my hidden talent of making anyone pissed off finally succeed in making even that iron-faced Mr. Epinhauser mad?

No, but it wasn't that weird.

I was trying to create a magic research club without being able to use magic, after all.

“Well, It’s…”

I began to explain everything.

* * *

“Oh, so it was like this?”

Fortunately, Mr. Epinhauser didn’t react like “You little punk, did you take the wrong medicine or something?” after listening to my explanation. His eyes even seemed to soften a little, so I was about to breathe a sigh of relief.

“I didn’t want to do it either, but I was basically forced to. Yeah.”

“Why are you forcing yourself to do it if you don’t want to?”

“Ah, well, the situation is kind of complicated, but…”

“Were you coerced?”

‘Yes! I honestly think this could be called coercion! Why did I have to become the president?’ I truly believed that it was quite the bombshell, but Mr. Epinhauser just shook his head instead.

“Hm, You’re not the kind of guy who would just take a loss like that, so there must be some reason behind it.”

Ah…

Yeah, I was used to it by then. That was the way I had lived, so I didn’t think I could even deny it anymore.

“Indeed, it’s quite impressive that you managed to gather quite a few people, and from both Class A and B at that. Do you already have a club room club advisor yet?”

“Not yet. I believe you are free to assign us a room and teacher.”

“Okay, then I shall let you know if your club has been approved at a later date.”

“Got it.”

It certainly was strange that the president of the club wasn't a wizard, but almost all of the club members were either wizards or magi. Therefore, there was no reason to not permit the creation of the club.

"Number 11…"

I was about to leave Mr. Epinhauser's private office when he called out to me again.

"Yeah?"

"…"

He just stared at me without saying anything. After a short period of silence, he added something briefly.

"I'll give you one merit point."

"…Thank you."

Mr. Epinhauser didn't really seem to have a reason to give me a merit point.

However, even if he didn't tell me why, I had a feeling that I understood.

The merit point I'd received in the first semester disappeared when they calculated our final grades for the first semester. Quite frankly, I didn't really care much about my grades at Temple, so I wasn't that impressed.

However, merit points weren't only useful for grades.

If one were subject to disciplinary actions or received demerits, one could offset them with merit points. I didn't have to use them in that way in the first semester. Of course, I shouldn't cross certain lines, but I could offset small incidents with that merit point.

So…

In other words, I had just earned myself temporary disciplinary immunity or the ability to offset a demerit for my second semester.

* * *

"Did you do it?"

"Of course I did."

Harriet was waiting for me in the hallway, and that was the first thing she asked when I came out, her eyes sparkling. She'd followed me to the teacher's office because she'd thought I might bail in the middle because I hated the idea of becoming the club's president.

Did she really like it that much that I was made president of the club? Did she want me to get annoyed to death? Huh?

Shit…

She'd gotten ahold of my weakness. I just wanted to join in name only and show up whenever I felt like it like I did with Grace. However, as the president, I had to be present all the time. If I didn't show up, I'm sure they'd be furious.

"The results will be announced later. It'll take a few days."

"Yes, yes."

I really loved seeing her mad, but it sure was upsetting seeing her so happy about all of that.

No…

Wasn't that kinda bad?

Why were my insides churning just by seeing her in a good mood? How far gone was I?

"I didn't mean this when I said that I wanted to be in charge of the chores…"

While it was true that a club president's job included various miscellaneous things, I didn't want to do something of that scale! Seeing the rotten expression on my face, Harriet just grinned widely, covering her mouth with one hand.

"You know that you have to come to the club room all the time now because you're the president, right? You can't skip even once, okay?"

"Are you that happy about this?"

“Of course, I…!”

As Harriet was about to say something, she quickly covered her mouth with her hand, her eyes wide open, and shook her head wildly.

“No! I’m not! I-I’m only happy because I was thinking about how annoyed you would get by all the things you would have to do as the president! That’s what I think is good about all this! Serves you right!”

“…Hey, you brat. This is something I did for you, something I don’t gain anything from, okay? Is it that difficult to say thank you?”

“Hmph! You’re always like this as well! Every time you are nice to me, you just irritate me in the end! So I’ll do that as well!”

“No, you weren’t even nice to me first. It’s more than clear. Didn’t you try to irritate me from start to finish?”

“Oh, what did you saaay-? All the luck for the future, Mr. President!”

Harriet just said, “Serves you right!”, then covered her ears and ran out of the hallway.

What “Mr. President”?

Did she completely forget that the word was supposed to be used as an honorific?

* * *

My original plan was to bring the magic major students of both classes to the next level, which would have happened a lot later originally, so that they could become stronger just a bit faster.

So I made the proposition that they could research magic and hang out together like that, but then I got caught up in it, and in the end, I became their club president as well.

Of course, it wasn’t like I could make time for them at all. No matter how much I

trained with Ellen every day, I would be able to make some extra time somehow.

The location of our classroom as well as the identity of our club advisor would be announced with the discussion results by Mr. Epinhauser.

Safe to say, it wasn't just a matter of getting permission to create the club.

It wasn't a regular club, but a club focused on magic research.

We didn't only need a club room, but facilities in which we could actually perform magical research, and there had to be enough space.

It wasn't something that could be solved by having a meeting, sitting around a table, and chatting.

We could use the equipment already present in Temple, but if there was a need to acquire new equipment or anything like that, they would have to report it to the school so that they could buy what they needed within the assigned budget and if their usage was permitted.

But wouldn't I have to do all those things as the class president?

I felt depressed…

Anyway, after that was done with…

Club-related problems wouldn't crop up for some time, and before that, there were only a few things I had to do which were related to it.

Harriet was rather excited and was talking to Adelia about what kind of research she would do when they got permission. Of course, since I was the president, I had to be part of that discussion, but honestly, I had no idea what they were talking about.

In the end, it was a quiet day, even though I was a little busy.

Of course, just because the day was quiet didn't mean it was uneventful. I had to keep up with my tight everyday schedule of training.

And I had made a big decision.

My total achievement points were more than 6000. I'd deliberately saved up my achievement points in case of an emergency because I didn't know what might happen.

Also, my talent-acquiring speed was much too fast. The Royal Class was a place where people who already had talents gathered, and only a few people would manage to awaken new talents.

However, I'd managed to awaken two such rare talents in less than a year. As I grew too quickly, I was afraid that people would get suspicious of me, so I'd decided to not awaken a new talent.

However, there would be no major crisis in the near future as far as I knew, so it was time for me to gradually awaken my third talent rather than continuing to save up and regretting it later.

There was no time like the present.

[Mana Control - 4000 Points]

The time to bloom my third talent had finally come.

Self-suggestion, mana sensitivity, and mana control.

I was thinking of slowly starting my mana control training.

[Achievement Points have been used.]

My new talent, mana control, had been awakened.

There were no major changes within my body. While mana sensitivity had also accelerated the pace of my mana growth, the only way I could make use of it was by using the Flame of Tuesday, which directly used mana, until I managed to use magic body strengthening.

Valier

Age : 17

Race : Archdemon

Current Status

[Strength 8.5(C-)]

[Agility 8.8(C-)]

[Dexterity 9.9(C-)]

[Magical Power 13(C+)]

[Stamina 13.2(C+)]

Talents

Supernatural - Self-Suggestion

Mana Sensitivity

Mana Control

Characteristics

[Sacred Spirit] - Increases resistance towards mind magic

[Hero's Blood] - Growth limit has increased dramatically. Increase in growth rate.

Abilities

[Demon Domination C] (Archdemon's unique ability)

(Cannot be used in current state.)

[Self-Suggestion C]

[Swordsmanship C]

Comprehensive Ability Assessment - Low-ranking Demon

Combat Level Assessment - B-

Compared to my stats at the beginning of the semester, there were some slight improvements in my physical stats, even though not much time had passed yet.

My growth rate seemed to be a lot faster than before. It should have slowed by then, but it instead grew even faster.

The reason for that was probably the effect of "Hero's Blood". Due to the characteristics I shared with Ellen, my growth rate had been dramatically boosted.

At that rate, some of my stats might reach B rank by the end of the semester. If I wanted to reach the B- Rank, I would have to get 14 points in a state. That was quite possible.

I then had two magic-related talents, but my magical power was still quite low.

It was just an investment for my future, after all.

However, that wasn't the end of it.

[Talent - Mana Sensitivity] [Talent - Mana Control]

[Sub-talents have been acquired.]

[When Magical Power reaches A Rank, ‘Mana Sensitivity’ and ‘Mana Control’ will evolve into ‘Mana Mastery’.]

What did that mean?

Talent evolution…

That concept didn’t exist before.

I’d set up comprehensive talents, but for two talents to combine to evolve into one… What the hell was that?

Anyway, it was a good thing. There was a possibility that I would receive something rather than nothing. There were a total of four students in the Royal Class who had comprehensive talents.

Ellen’s ‘Mana Mastery’ and ‘Weapon Mastery’

Cliffman’s ‘Combat'

Harriet’s 'Magic'

Louis Ancton’s 'Studying'

Furthermore, Dettomolian’s ‘Sorcery’ could be added to this. Anyway, comprehensive talents had overwhelming advantages. When I bought my first talent it cost me 1000 points, after that, when I got my first magic talent, it only cost me 2000 points.

But what about now?

[Swordsmanship - 8000 Points]

Far beyond the 1000, 2000 and 4000 Points I needed before, I needed 8000 achievement points to awaken my fourth talent. I didn't even know what I had to do to earn that many points.

So what about comprehensive talents?

[Magic - 50000 points]

[Combat - 50000 points]

[Weapon Mastery - 30000 points]

[Studying - 30000 points]

It wasn't just twice as expensive, all of them had gotten a lot more expensive than what they used to cost. I couldn't even dream of spending or earning that many achievement points to buy a comprehensive talent.

And suddenly I had the possibility of receiving one.

Mana Mastery, one of Ellen's talents, was a combination of Mana Control and Mana Sensitivity.

[Mana Mastery - 50000 points]

Among the comprehensive talents, it was the priciest second only to Magic and Combat.

They were necessary talents for wizards as well as close combat fighters who were dreaming of reaching the Master Class.

And then the talent above these two, Mana Mastery. While it wasn't at the level of Magic Body Strengthening, one would definitely be able to reach the Master Class using it, while not as easily.

However, its acquisition conditions were rather strict.

'A' rank in Magical Power…

In other words, the concept behind it seemed to be that my talents would be forced to evolve as my understanding and control over magic itself would become a lot stronger after I reached Rank A in my Magical Power stat.

Bertus also had Mana Sensitivity and Mana Control, however, his rank in Magical Power wasn't A, so if he were to reach Rank A in that stat, would he also acquire Mana Mastery?

Actually, Ellen's Magical Power Rank had been A ever since I'd first seen her. Ellen's magical power was on the level of a monster, too.

So that meant that Mana Mastery wasn't an innate talent, but one that could be acquired if certain conditions were satisfied.

My Magical Power was 13 at Rank C+ at the moment.

Rank specifications were as follows.

14~15(B-) 16~17(B) 18~19(B+) 20~22(A-) 23~25(A) 26~30(A+)

My magical power had to go up by 10 points to reach Rank A.

My initial magical power stat was 9.9.

So far, it had risen by 3.1 points, and according to that Yoga Master, that was pretty fast.

It had risen by 3 in half a year, but if it kept growing at that rate, I would take me more than a year to go up by 10 more. Of course, it would be a different story if I completely focused on my magical power growth rather than anything else.

In any case, a new goal had appeared like a bolt from the blue and it was also different from anything I had expected as well.

A new talent…

And talent evolution…

Mana Mastery was the talent I needed most at that moment.

CHAPTER 204

I had a lot to do, and in the end, even my training had to be supplemented.

My training routine ended up being different from my first semester.

Part of it was due to the enhancement of my supernatural power.

-Kwaking!

“I definitely felt it.”

“Really?”

“I think it would be good if you did more of that.”

“That’s a relief.”

Ellen took my blow and nodded. Self-Suggestion was quite the ambiguous supernatural power. So, up to that point, I had used it by recalling the strengthening type preset in practice.

That was when I had come up with a more efficient way to use it, and it seemed to be quite effective.

It was a bit cringy to talk about it in detail, and it was also rather cringy to use it, but as long as it worked, that didn’t really matter.

Rather than general strengthening, it was closer to a specialization—it was a way to diversify the use of my supernatural ability.

One was the specialization of my Self-Suggestion.

And then there was another thing…

“…I don’t know.”

"…I don't even know how to teach you that either."

Ellen was staring at me as I stood there with my eyes closed doing nothing.

I had taken my first step towards Mana Mastery.

I was trying to learn Magic Body Strengthening.

Ellen had realized how to use Magic Body Strengthening on her own. Since then, she had been focusing on adapting and mastering her Magic Body Strengthening through one-on-one lessons. Ellen was quite the unique case, so only she could take those classes during her first year. I wouldn't be accepted even if I applied.

While I did have my supernatural ability, I still needed to be able to strengthen myself using magic as well.

While trying to handle magic like that, I would also speed up the growth of my Magical Power stat.

That was why I trained in the training room for a long time and then received one-on-one lessons on Magic Body Strengthening from Ellen.

However, Ellen was quite literally a genius beyond any other genius, so she just looked at me as if to say that she just knew how to do it, wondering why I didn't.

"I can just do it, but why can't you?"

"Fucking hell, are you and I the same? You're the weird one for just being able to do it!"

"…But still."

" 'But still… ' what?"

'Were you and I the same?!'

Since I had two talents related to magic, I wondered if I could maybe get a feeling for Magic Body Strengthening.

But I didn't feel a thing.

4000 points… Was it really worth spending all of those points? I had no idea what changed!

Well…

Bertus would already be a Swordmaster if it would just work as soon as one had those two talents. He had them since the beginning, after all.

Mana Mastery…

That was the deciding factor.

“Hmm… Hmm…”

Ellen also seemed to struggle with how to explain the technique to me, saying that she just released her magical power and ended up doing it.

Yeah…

I also wouldn’t be able to explain to someone how to breathe. I just knew how to do it. Magical Body Strengthening was just like breathing to Ellen.

Ellen just started to frown, mumbling to herself, and shook her head, seeming as if she just couldn’t come up with a proper way to explain.

What’s that?

Wasn’t she pretty cute, acting like that?

It put me in a good mood somehow.

"Just try again."

“…Again, you say. That would mean that I did something before, though.”

I really hadn’t done anything… I had no idea how to even start. If she just asked me to try again, nothing would happen, just like before!

"Anyway, just do it."

“…Okay.”

Ellen sat in front of me as I tried to focus.

Of course, I didn’t fucking know what to do. There was that thing called magical power in one’s body, but I had no idea how to even feel it, so how could it be possible for me to strengthen my body with that stuff?

“Did it fail?”

“Yeah.”

“Hmm…”

Ellen just clasped my hands with a puzzled expression on her face.

Was she able to detect anything?

However, Ellen suddenly put my hands down as if something startled her.

“…What?”

“…No. Keep going."

What happened?

Did she get shy suddenly? She didn't seem to care before, though?

After that, Ellen didn’t grab my hands again. She just stared at me like that.

We sat facing each other as I kept on groaning for hours.

It was hellish training. I felt like a blind man trying to grasp what an elephant looked like by touching it.

No, that couldn’t even be called training because I didn’t even know how to start the process.

* * *

If one invested time in things such as swordsmanship or physical training, one would get results mostly equivalent to the time spent on them. Even if one's growth rate grew slower eventually, it was obvious that the physical pain one felt would lead to more growth in the end.

However, that didn't apply to Magic Body Strengthening.

Ellen was too gifted and only gave unrealistic and vague explanations, and I only ended up wanting to shit because all I did was put my strength in my stomach.

'Should I wait until it'll be part of our regular curriculum?'

But I didn't know if I would be able to do it even if I took those lessons.

I thought that I would be able to do something because I had all the necessary talents.

If I managed to be able to use Magic Body Strengthening before the end of that year, I would be called a genius, while not to Ellen's level.

I wasn't expecting too much.

Everything would be solved if those two talents evolved into Mana Mastery.

So, except for the midterm exams, the group mission, and the final exam, there were no incidents or special events planned for Temple.

Of course, I didn't have any time to just be idle because I had to train, take care of the Rotary Gang's business, and look after the Magic Research Society.

Most of the main story during the second semester took place during the festival and the group mission, however, I didn't know what might happen in the future.

During the first semester, I acted a bit hateful and disgusting because I didn't want to be looked down on by the others, so no one dared to do that. That was why I planned on staying out of trouble after that.

There was no reason for me to pick fights with others anymore, after all.

I was trying to act in a more constructive way. I wanted to focus on things like making money, getting stronger, and gaining influence.

It wasn't exactly stressful, but in the end, I still had a lot of things I had to take care of, so I was suffering from fatigue, if not chronic fatigue.

And so, a few days later…

There was another thing I was rather concerned about.

"Uhm. Ah… Hello. Reinhardt."

"Huh? Oh…"

Charlotte still wasn't comfortable around me.

I felt something more from her behavior than awkwardness.

* * *

After Dettomolian's fortune telling, things had become awkward between Charlotte and me for no apparent reason. However, there was no reason for us to believe what he told us at all. I thought things would get better after a while, but they didn't.

No, rather, things had gotten even more awkward than when we'd just heard his prophecy.

Technically, rather than awkward, she just seemed incredibly uncomfortable around me. She couldn't even make eye contact with me, and if we ever ran into each other in the hallway, she would only greet me briefly before quickly passing by.

What the hell?

Did she become overly conscious of me because she had been thinking about that too much? That didn't seem to be the case. If that were the case… shouldn't she seem more… energetic?

It didn't seem that she became conscious of me in that way, but it was more than obvious that she was very aware of me for a slightly different reason.

But I didn't really have much contact with Charlotte. For what reason did she feel so uncomfortable around me?

D-did I cause trouble without knowing?

I had reached the point where I even doubted myself.

However, I couldn’t think of any particular reason why Charlotte would feel like that except for the incident with Dettomolian.

What the fuck?

Did she really just become conscious of me as a man?

I don’t think so, though?

Unless…?

Ah…

Was that what one called being delusional?

What the hell was I thinking? I seriously started thinking stuff like “What if the Princess suddenly fell for me after hearing that divination?”, but Charlotte was still completely fixated on Valier, right? No, well, that was also me, though.

But what should I call it if Charlotte, who seemed to have fallen in love with Valier, suddenly turned to me? A change of heart? But both of them were me, so it couldn’t be that. Well, maybe it could still be called a change of heart.

“What are you thinking about?”

“…Huh? Why?”

“You look frustrated."

Eventually, Ellen, who was going back with me after our classes ended, spoke up.

* * *

I had many problems, but I felt like Charlotte's attitude changing all of a sudden was rather strange, which threw my thoughts into disarray. Charlotte was a person dear to me, after all, regardless of my personal needs and reasons.

She was the first person I'd met in this world, and she was also the person who'd made me realize that I was capable of risking my own life to save someone else.

After various twists and turns, we'd reunited, and while our direct meeting wasn't that good, we'd ended up with a normal—maybe even moderately friendly—relationship.

But something had changed ever since we talked with Dettomolian.

Charlotte would pass me by while greeting me awkwardly as if she felt embarrassed ever since then, but she didn't only seem embarrassed, it looked like she found it difficult to greet me and would shuffle past me with her head bowed.

While I didn't know what exactly happened, I understood that the situation was getting weirder.

Let's just assume…

Let's just say that Charlotte really liked me (Reinhardt)…

Then what would that mean for the future?

What if Charlotte confessed and I said I didn't like her in that way? What would happen then?

Wouldn't they say something like, "How dare someone of such humble standing refuse the courtship of the Imperial Princess?" and send my head flying?

But what if I said something like, "It's my honor, Princess."?

Wouldn't they say something like, "There is no place for someone like you in the Imperial Family!" and send my head flying?

Whatever I did, my head would go flying.

I was pretty sure that wasn't her view on things, I was just arbitrarily thinking stuff

like, “What if the Princess actually liked me?”. I didn’t know what Charlotte was thinking.

Or was she perhaps afraid?

Was she afraid that Dettomolian’s prophecy would come true, so she tried to put some distance between us?

What should I do if that was the case?

I had no intentions of marrying her, so should I just tell her to treat me like usual?

Then wouldn’t they say stuff like, “How dare you discuss something like marriage with the Princess?” and send my head flying?

No, no matter how I thought about it, it would just end in my head being sent flying.

I didn’t really know her reasons.

It just seemed that Charlotte was uncomfortable around me. Sometimes I felt like she was trying to avoid me somewhat.

It might be something like that.

Although we had only spent one day together, Charlotte liked me (Valier). That was certain. However, she’d been told that she would end up marrying the other me (Reinhardt).

Did she try to avoid me because she thought that her feelings for Valier would end up fading otherwise?

Of course, I didn’t believe that Dettomolian’s words would come true.

But let’s say it really was a prediction of the future. If it was some kind of oracle, for example…

Rather, wouldn’t the actions one took to avoid the oracle’s fulfillment turn into actions that actually led to it?

Just like King Laius’ action of abandoning Oedipus after hearing the oracle that his

son would end up killing himself and marrying his wife became the decisive event that led to its fulfillment.

If that was the case, the action Charlotte took to distance herself from me would only become the decisive action that would make the oracle come true.

Of course, that was only under the assumption that Dettomolian's words would really come true.

In the end, all stories involving oracles had the same message:

Fate was unavoidable, and what would happen had to happen. The actions one took to avoid said fate would only bring one closer to its fulfillment.

While I was thinking about that problem involving Charlotte, I felt an eerie feeling burning my spine.

I started to think that everything I did to stop the Gate Crisis would either have no effect or might cause a slew of other completely unexpected problems.

The Gate Crisis was fated to happen.

And I was trying to prevent it.

Would the measures I took to prevent it actually work properly? And even if they worked, would there just be a different kind of Gate Crisis?

I couldn't tell.

The Gate Incident would happen later.

Charlotte seemed to really feel uncomfortable around me, and I wasn't sure why, but I thought it might have something to do with Dettomolian's words.

That was the problem.

If Charlotte had decided to distance herself from me, what was I supposed to say to her? That she didn't have to do that? Did I even have the right to say anything?

Charlotte could do whatever she wanted, and it was rather weird if I just told her

what to do or what not to do.

Eventually, while I was thinking in my room, my communication device rang.

[…Reinhardt.]

Charlotte's slightly gloomy voice came out of the device.

[Can we… talk for a moment?]

Judging by her voice, it seemed like she had come to a decision.

* * *

At Charlotte’s request, I left Royal Class’s dormitory. Charlotte was waiting for me at a bridge stretching over a small pond, deep in the park in front of the dormitory. There was no one around because people usually didn’t venture that deep into it.

Although only a few people ever went there, it was well maintained, and the pond’s water was transparent and clear.

With her arms on the bridge’s railing, Charlotte looked at me, then nodded.

“You came.”

“Yeah.”

She had a slightly different feeling about her than the Charlotte who had just passed by me up until then.

Before, she’d seemed beyond awkward and uncomfortable.

Seeing her there, she had an incredibly sad look in her eyes. Charlotte leaned against the bridge railing, looking in the direction of the pond, and I leaned against the other

one looking in the opposite direction.

We didn't face each other.

I thought that would be more comfortable for Charlotte and me.

I didn't know what to say to Charlotte.

"I have been acting strangely these days, haven't I?"

"…I can't say no to that. Yeah, you've been weird."

"After hearing something as embarrassing as that… I just couldn't help it."

"I was like that as well…"

Dettomolian's words…

He'd told us we would get married in the future.

That might have been why Charlotte had been acting like that.

"It's ridiculous, right?"

Charlotte and I getting married… She said it was ridiculous; I agreed with that.

"Yeah… You're right."

"Don't you feel bad when I say something like that?"

"…Huh?"

Charlotte looked at me with a slightly mischievous smile tugging at her lips. I was slightly taken aback by that.

"Well, you know. I don't think of you in that way, but because you denied it so vehemently, I felt annoyed for no apparent reason. 'Am I really that bad a catch?' was what I was thinking."

"N-no. No! That's not it! You know what I meant when I said that!"

It’s not because I hated the idea of marrying her that I said that it would never happen, I had just been saying that from a realistic point of view. It could never happen! She knew that!

It wasn’t like I wasn’t low-key happy to hear that I might marry an Imperial Princess, but I’d just gotten freaked out and denied it, saying that it would never happen.

Right, that might have been upsetting.

“…That wasn’t my intention. I’m sorry if that made you feel bad.”

“I know. I know. I know what you meant. It’s just… It’s something that has no hope of happening. I think… it would have been even worse if you were actually happy when you heard it. That’s what I thought.”

Charlotte was smiling at me.

Well…

If I actually said something like, “I’d love that. Marrying an Imperial Princess in the future. Life sure is good,” that would have been seriously weird.

It wasn't that she felt awkward, Charlotte just avoided me out of her own sincerity. It seemed like she actually believed the prophecy, so she’d got scared or something.

“Well, he did say that there was a chance that he was wrong, but I still ended up thinking about it seriously, like, “What the hell would have to happen for me to get married to you?” something like that.”

“…Seriously?”

“What? Can’t I do that?”

“N-no, that’s not it… There’s nothing wrong with that, but… Isn’t it a bit strange to talk about that in front of me?”

I actually had done that as well. What would have to happen for me to get married to Charlotte?

“It’s fine, it’s not like I like you or am interested in you in that way. I was just

thinking, if that were the end result, whether there was a reasonable scenario that would have led to it. I was just curious."

Charlotte spoke with a strict expression on her face as if telling me to not misunderstand. Charlotte simply pondered whether there was a reasonable explanation for that outcome.

She was watching the fish swimming in the pond.

"Reinhardt, you see…"

"…Hm?"

"I think… me ending up marrying you… isn't so impossible."

"…Huuh?"

The answer Charlotte gave me was far beyond anything I could have imagined. She smiled at me, who was completely dumbfounded.

I didn't know what she was thinking, but that smile didn't reach her eyes.

CHAPTER 205

A marriage between me and Charlotte…

Just like I thought about it, Charlotte thought about it as well. Charlotte seemed to think that it wasn't that impossible.

I actually didn't think that it was completely impossible either. However, It wouldn't be between her and Reinhardt, but between her and Valier.

However, what Charlotte was saying was that she didn't find it that impossible that she would end up marrying Reinhardt, not Valier.

Charlotte looked at me with narrowed eyes when she saw me panicking.

"What? Do you want to deny it again? Do you hate me that much?"

"N-no! It's not that I hate you! It's because you said something like that so suddenly!"

Didn't she basically ask me to marry her?

Wouldn't it be weirder if I didn't get flustered?

"That's not what it meant? Does that mean you like me then?"

"W-why are you doing this to me…?"

I'd said I didn't hate her, so that meant I had to like her? What the hell did she want from me? Charlotte clicked her tongue.

"So you can't even say that you like me. You're a very strange person. Just what do I lack?"

"P-please. I'm about to go crazy here. I can't give you an answer because this feels like a trap no matter what I do."

"Hmhmm. Fine. I'll stop bullying you then."

When I basically pleaded to her on the cold, hard ground, Charlotte's smile reached her eyes as if telling me that she would stop for the moment.

"It's just that… I don't know how you think or feel. I mean, do you know what thoughts I hold in my heart?"

"Right."

Charlotte said that she'd imagined what would have to happen in order for her to end up marrying me in the future. She didn't know my thoughts, but she did know her own, so she just imagined those scenarios according to what she knew.

"You and I share a certain secret. Because of that, I might become emotionally dependent on you after some time, I might even come to love you… That's what I thought."

The matters concerning Valier.

If she was talking about secrets, it would be that. I was personally delivering those letters to her as well.

However, wasn't I just a kind of contact person? In fact, Charlotte wasn't actually emotionally relying on Reinhardt, but Valier. So how did she end up thinking that she might end up being emotionally dependent on me to the point where she might start to love me?

"…Not on that boy?"

As if she knew that I would ask that, Charlotte smiled.

"You don't have to deliver those letters anymore."

Charlotte was wearing the saddest smile I had ever seen in my life.

* * *

"…I have been acting quite selfish so far. While you were taking so many risks, I never even thought about how dangerous these things actually were or how you felt about all this. I know you feel troubled because you're basically stuck between Bertus and me. All this might be burdensome to you, you might even be scared. However, I never

thought about that possibility."

"Thank you."

"I think I took too many things for granted, only voicing my gratitude and nothing more."

"I'm sorry, Reinhardt. I don't think it was right of me to ask something like that of you just because I'm the Imperial Princess."

"You might have reluctantly cooperated with me because you risked losing your gang members who are like your family if you turned down my request, but I never thought of that. Maybe you weren't actually worried about that, but I still should have considered it."

"As someone asking another person to undertake such dangerous work, I should have considered just what kinds of risks that person had to shoulder, how pressured they would feel, how scared they had to be… I didn't even think about such matters."

"I was negligent. It's all my fault, Reinhardt."

"The only reason you walk on this tightrope is because of my request."

"You'd be better off just being on Bertus's side in Class A."

"However, because of me, because of my greed, you got involved in this dangerous tug-of-war between us."

"I put you in danger, I made you suffer, and then I acted as if my gratitude was already payment enough for what you did."

"You had no reason to help me. What I have done to you up to this point was nothing more than coercion:"

"So, Reinhardt. I want to apologize for my actions up to this point."

"You don't have to deliver those letters for me anymore. I already received so much from you. You can finally stop that dangerous tightrope walk. You can finally choose to be just on one side."

“On Bertus’s side.”

“I’m not upset about it, I don’t deserve to be.”

“If you were to stand on my side, you would become Bertus’s enemy. If you stand on Bertus’s side, however, I won’t ever be your enemy.”

Charlotte just looked at me quietly after she finished talking. She wasn’t worried about that marriage prophecy or something like that.

The letters…

She felt disappointed in herself because she didn’t consider how much pressure I must have been under for delivering those letters.

That was why Charlotte felt so uncomfortable around me.

I didn’t really find it difficult, though.

And yet she felt apologetic towards me.

I had no clue where she’d gotten that idea from, but Charlotte was telling me that I could stop delivering those letters.

“Then… Will you deliver those letters… through someone else then? Is it something like that?”

If I stopped, someone else would have to visit Eleris in person. I didn’t think of that before. That would complicate things quite a bit.

However, Charlotte just shook her head.

“No, I won’t let anyone else deliver the letters.”

Her answer was completely unexpected.

“You didn’t know, right? There are only three people who know that boy’s whereabouts. You, me, and that wizard.”

“…”

“I didn’t even tell any of my people. For certain reasons, I have become completely unable to tell anyone else now.”

So if she wouldn’t let anyone else deliver them, would Charlotte herself bring them to Eleris?

“So… What are you going to do, then?”

“I won’t contact him anymore.”

When Charlotte called me on my communication device, her voice seemed full of determination as if she had just decided on something. She wasn’t trying to negotiate with me or anything like that.

She’d decided to break off any contact she had with Valier.

Charlotte didn’t tell any of her people about Valier’s whereabouts, keeping it a secret. At first, she did it because she thought the fewer people know, the better, but then she simply couldn’t tell them for a completely different reason.

Every time I had to pretend to deliver letters to her, write them, and read her replies, I felt guilt stabbing my heart.

I wouldn’t have to write these hellish letters anymore.

That would be great.

“What I mean to say is, you don’t have to take on any more risks.”

However, if Charlotte was scared that she’d exposed me to danger and felt guilty because she thought that she’d forced me to do something, she didn’t have to be.

She shouldn’t force herself to break off something she didn’t want to break off while wearing such a sad expression.

“Looks like you still have no fucking clue about me?”

“…What?”

While Charlotte spoke very gently and softly, I talked pretty roughly.

The way someone would talk if they felt pissed.

The way that bastard Reinhardt would.

“I’m the kinda bastard that would fucking yell at ya if I didn’t wanna fucking do something.”

“…”

Charlotte looked at me, slightly perplexed when those harsh words suddenly left my mouth. I guessed that she didn’t expect me to react like that.

Yeah, the Reinhardt everyone knew was a crazy bastard. He was the type of guy who would get annoyed if things didn’t work out his way, which would lead him to act on his temper. And if someone was acting like a fucking jerk, he would directly ask them why they were acting like a fucking jerk—no matter who that person was.

Speaking harshly to Charlotte for the first time, I asked her if she fucking forgot what kind of guy I was.

"If I thought your request was shit, I would have fucking said that it was shit. So, did I ever do that?”

“No… You didn’t.”

“See? I did that stuff ‘cause I wanted to.”

Charlotte’s eyes widened at my words.

“I just shout out whatever comes to my mind and do whatever I want to. You’re no exception.”

No.

Charlotte was kind of an exception…

And so was Bertus…

But for the moment, I just had to put it like that!

“I did it because I wanted to. I mean, I wouldn’t have fucking done it if I didn’t want to, so your worries and apologies are meaningless.”

Clear droplets were gradually forming in the corners of Charlotte’s eyes.

“So if you want me to deliver those letters again, don’t think about that useless stuff and just give em to me.”

“You want to deliver them?”

“You want to have them delivered, right? I mean, what’s so hard about delivering those small pieces of paper anyway?”

Tears rolled down Charlotte’s eyes; then she looked at me with a helpless smile on her lips.

She was crying, and yet, she was laughing.

“Yeah… So that’s what you’d say, as expected.”

Did she even expect that that would happen? Did she know I would react like that? Charlotte wiped away her tears with a handkerchief.

“Still, it’s okay, you really don’t have to deliver those letters anymore.”

Charlotte spoke these words with a sad look in her eyes.

It seemed like she had already made up her mind about Valier, the problem she had with me aside.

“Why… if it’s not too rude to ask?”

“…It’s not rude. It’s just a difficult question to answer.”

Charlotte bowed her head slightly as she faced me. I couldn’t help but be surprised because I didn’t expect her to act that way.

“Thank you very, very much, Reinhardt.”

I didn’t have to deliver Charlotte’s letters anymore from that point on.

I didn't have to torture myself by writing those replies lined with nothing but lies anymore.

However, it was far more torturous for me to see Charlotte struggling with her own sadness like that.

But there was nothing I could say to her.

* * *

Charlotte didn't weep loudly, however she shed some tears that she wiped away.

After some time, she found her composure again. She turned to me again wearing a rather awkward smile.

"I'm sorry, I always end up showing you this ugly side of me."

"I'll just think of it as an honor."

Wasn't it actually pretty bad that the Imperial Princess was the only one who would end up revealing her weak side every time?

"Anyway, that's what I wanted to say. You don't have to deliver any letters from now on. So you don't have to walk that tightrope between me and Bertus anymore."

Charlotte said she wouldn't resent or see me as her enemy even if I completely joined Bertus's side. When I thought of it, I only had contact with Charlotte because of that request. If I didn't have to deliver those letters anymore, there would be no reason for me to have any connection to Charlotte.

So she was essentially letting me go.

No.

"So should we pretend that we don't know each other from now on or something?"

"We… should, shouldn't we…?"

Charlotte seemed a little dazed when I said that without a hint of hesitation.

“Isn’t that kind of sad?”

“H-huh?”

When I threw the fastball that I would be sad at her, Charlotte seemed even more shocked.

“Of course, I can’t say that I enjoy almost getting squashed between Bertus and you, but if you just tell me to stick to Bertus, doesn't that mean that you were actually just using me? Don’t you think so?”

“W-well… I would, wouldn’t it?”

“I thought we were friends. That’s why I’ve been helping you so far.”

“F-friends?”

“What’s with that shocked reaction? Did you really just think of me as Henchman One?”

“N-no! No! Not at all! I never thought of you like that!”

Charlotte’s face reddened and she wildly shook her head. I felt like I had been squirming before Charlotte up until then. However, as she felt very apologetic towards me, she seemed very flustered when I uttered those words.

One could say that the tables had turned.

Even though what I was talking about was pretty much nonsense, Charlotte still ended up stuttering like that.

“So… are we friends?”

“Th-that’s… That’s…”

When I asked her that with a big smile spreading across my face, Charlotte’s lips trembled slightly as she slightly raised her head. It might have been unbearably embarrassing for her to say with her own mouth, or maybe the situation just seemed utterly ridiculous to her

“So, yes or no?”

“It… it’s… Urg…”

That was something I used to say when I was trying to pressure someone. It’s what I’d used when Cayer was picking a fight with me.

In my second semester, I could say those words to the Imperial Princess—although the details were slightly different.

It’s not like I was friends with that other guy, after all!

“Th-that’s… That’s correct…”

Maybe because she felt ashamed or humiliated, she nodded slightly, her face red, and body trembling slightly.

“So, you can obviously ask a friend for help or something, you can also meet up with them on your way back and talk to them, so don’t think too much about this.”

“…”

“You’re too smart. Sometimes that’s the root of your problems.”

If she wanted to interpret a situation badly, she would always imagine the worst-case scenario.

I just did what I did because Charlotte requested me to, and after she started to think that she might have forced me, she became convinced that she’d somehow made a big mistake.

Spending too much time alone with one’s thoughts would lead to problems, after all.

Of course, I also spent an unhealthy amount of time alone with my thoughts.

I’d also noticed that Charlotte was uncomfortable around me, so I’d also let my imagination run in very weird directions. My imagination was so far apart from what actually was going on.

Both Charlotte and I had deeply thought about the other on our own, making various

assumptions.

And both of us were completely wrong.

In the end, we had to confront each other to find out the truth. Charlotte was a little dazed when she heard that the root of the problem was that she was too smart.

She then took a few deep breaths. When the color of her face returned to normal, Charlotte looked at me with a somewhat playful smile on her face.

“Right, we're friends. So let me ask you something.

“Sure, go ahead.”

“Is Bertus also your friend?”

“…Huh?”

I was a little surprised by that question, which appeared at a rather unexpected time.

“Is Bertus your friend as well?”

“I mean, that’s… Well. It would be nice if he thought that way, I guess…”

Were Bertus and I really friends?

I definitely thought of Charlotte as a friend, but I didn’t know how Bertus actually thought of me. With her head slightly tilted, Charlotte smiled at me.

“Well, don’t you think that you are actually a lot closer to Bertus than to me?”

She certainly was smiling, but it somehow seemed a little threatening. What? She thought that I was closer to Bertus? That had to be a misunderstanding. While I had been a bit surprised by Bertus’s behavior, if I had to choose who I was closer to, it would obviously be her!

Bertus didn’t only try to kill her, but me as well!

“N-no? I don’t think so, though? What makes you think that?”

“Then why did you ask Bertus to help with your Gang’s new business and not me?”

Ah. I felt my brain freeze for a second when I heard Charlotte’s words.

It was because of that!

Bertus told her, so she’d found out!

“You had to think that I was unreliable, or you believed that Bertus could do better than me, or you just asked him because you were closer to him personally, right?”

Why did you ask Bertus when you could have asked me? I thought we were friends. Oh, so you asked Bertus because you were even closer friends with him, is that it?

That was what Charlotte seemed to ask with her eyes

Did she become upset after she heard about that?

No, did she come to the conclusion that I might actually hate her or be afraid of her after thinking about it for a while?

“W-well you know, because of the situation between us and that atmosphere, I really couldn’t help but…”

“You couldn’t help it? Why?”

“I-I mean… if I just came up to you and suddenly asked you for a favor right after Dettomolian told us that we were going to end up marrying each other. Aah! That would have been a bit much!”

“Ah.”

It seemed that Charlotte only just realized when I had made that request.

It would have been really weird if I just acted as if I didn’t care at all, so there was no way I would have been able to ask her like that!

“…”

Both Charlotte’s and my face were red. After much talking, we eventually came back

to the first topic which started everything.

Dettomolian's prophecy…

We didn't say anything for a while.

Finally, Charlotte opened her mouth after stammering for a bit.

"But really… Honestly, let me ask you one more question."

"…What is it?"





Charlotte stared at me.

“Am I not good-looking enough for you?”

“…Huh?”

"So, am I attractive enough or not?”

"W-why would you ask me something like that?!”

“No! You! You’ve been so strangely repulsed by the idea of marrying me! Shouldn’t you have been glad? No matter how good-looking Ellen Artorius is, how am I inferior to her? I know that there are a few things in which I’m far below her, but I have a lot of good parts as well, right?”

“Why are you talking about her all of a sudden?!”

“Anyway, my looks are fine, right?! Just tell me! Yes or no!”

Yes or no. Charlotte shot the question I asked her right back at me. We were talking about quite heavy things up to that point, but after we declared that we were friends, why did the conversation suddenly turn out like that?

“Yeah! You’re attractive! Ah! I’m sorry!”

“…Hearing that from you, it seems like I forced you to do it, don’t you think that’s even worse?”

“…What do you want from me?”

“…I’m not sure either.”

Charlotte’s answer grew even more rotten when she heard my answer.

Charlotte simply stretched with a sullen expression on her face before she let out a sigh.

"Friends…”

“…”

She then smiled at me.

“Congratulations, Reinhardt."

“For what?"

"For becoming the second friend of the Imperial Princess of Gradias.”

She seemed to get along with everyone in Class B.

However, it seemed like she drew a line between them and herself in her mind. Did being friends mean a lot to Charlotte?

I knew who the first one was without her telling me.

The second one…

So, in the end, I would be Charlotte’s only friend. Seeing me like that, Charlotte frowned and smiled a bit mischievously.

“Consider it an honor.”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s an honor.”

“You seem to be getting more and more comfortable with me, so I shall just think of it as a good sign. Though you did act a bit dirty…”

Charlotte was watching the fish swimming in the pond.

The deep sorrow hidden inside of her was nowhere to be seen.

“Let’s do our best… Or something.”

“Yes.”

I didn’t know in what we should do or best.

But we should just do our best.

That somehow seemed like a form of consolation to me.

CHAPTER 206

After returning to her private room, Charlotte changed into some comfortable clothes and lay down on her bed, curling up her legs.

Had she done well?

She had always thought that she had to do that someday.

He was already far out of her reach, so she'd thought that she should cut off contact someday. However, she couldn't make that decision because she felt like the moment she cut off that weak link, everything just might completely disappear.

He was within reach…

That feeling of being able to see the boy whenever she wanted was very important to her, even though she was unable to actually see him.

It was hard for her to have that feeling just disappear.

However, eventually, Charlotte decided to break that link herself. She did it because, for one, she realized how much she was endangering Reinhardt with all of it, but she couldn't keep having contact with that boy anymore for her own sake as well.

He was just some boy whose identity was completely unknown. Even he himself didn't know who he was.

Keeping up that link was a foolish act driven by her emotions, and cutting off their connection was, in the end, the most logical choice.

'May you be happy in that place where neither Bertus nor I can find you.'

It was the right thing to do for that boy that had been thrown into danger from his involvement with her. If it would really help him, then she'd made the right move. While no one knew who he was, and he was highly suspicious, Charlotte wanted him to be happy.

She didn’t know where he was or who he was…

But she wished the boy happiness.

Charlotte was trying to forget him completely.

However, not everything had disappeared.

Among all the stupid things she did to find the boy, Charlotte had made another connection.

—A classmate who’d made a rather bad first impression on her and was surrounded by bad rumors.

Reinhardt…

After helping each other out in various ways, they’d become friends.

While trying to find someone she cared for, another person appeared for whom she cared.

Charlotte felt guilty.

She thought that having such feelings in itself was a form of cowardice.

Because she was afraid of treading on the dangerous path, she simply chose the comfortable one instead.

She didn’t like Reinhardt in such a way.

However, she was worried that those feelings of worry would grow into something else.

Charlotte de Gradias was afraid of that.

'Detto.'

‘I hope it’s true that I will end up marrying Reinhardt.’

Charlotte hugged her pillow and put her face in it.

‘Because that would mean that I’ll still be alive until then.'

The pillow was gradually getting wet with tears.

She felt greatly disappointed in herself that those strong and anxious feelings she had held for that boy could be changed so easily.

However, even more than that…

She didn’t want to die.

She didn’t want to lose the precious life that the boy had saved for nothing. Her life was a gift the boy had given her. It was the only thing remaining from their relationship.

She wasn’t that greedy to live. It wasn’t like she desperately wanted to live more.

Her life itself was simply precious to her. It was the only and last gift from the person that was most precious to her in the world

That was why she didn’t want to lose it.

So she’d rather hope that the prophecy would come true.

If that were the case, that would mean that she wouldn’t lose this precious treasure until then. It meant she would be able to hold on for a bit longer.

Reinhardt thought that If the prophecy of his marriage with Charlotte de Gardias came true, that would mean both of them would survive the Gate Crisis.

Charlotte had similar thoughts.

* * *

You don’t have to deliver those letters anymore.

Charlotte hadn't told me why she had made that decision. I was also wondering why she didn't even try sending the letters through someone else.

I had some doubts and some guesses, but in the end, all speculation was simply meaningless.

Only Charlotte would know the truth.

In the end, the big stone Dettomolian had thrown into the pond brought about one change after the other.

However, things hadn't really changed.

To be exact, things had gone back to normal.

"Hello, Reinhardt."

"Hi."

"…Hi? Hi, and that's it?"

"Then what do you want me to say?"

"…Basically, you utterly lack any form of courtesy towards others. It's not your status that made you that way, there's something fundamentally wrong with you, you know?"

"What am I supposed to do then?"

"You should fix that attitude."

Correction.

Things hadn't gotten back to normal, I actually talked a little more with Charlotte than I had in the past, and whenever Charlotte saw me, her eyes would turn sharp and she'd scold me for not being friendlier.

It felt like our relationship was neither good nor bad. Since there was nothing tying us together anymore, Charlotte and I had become more comfortable with each other, and as I had gotten more comfortable, I sometimes tended to act more crudely, but

Charlotte always had something to say about that, so we would fight.

It was a little different from how things were between me and Harriet.

If we lived in the same dormitory, we might have fought more often, but I didn't really meet Charlotte that frequently unless we had Supernatural Power Class or our Common Classes.

Anyway, Charlotte really wanted to fix my personality.

"I've been living quite well even though I'm like this, though?"

"Hooh. Just how could such a beggar be born in the Empire?"

Sorry, but I'm not from the Empire. I'm what you call an immigrant.

Charlotte's body shook seemingly in disgust before she took Scarlett and went away.

Of course, Charlotte was still Charlotte, so even though we quarreled, she smiled and waved to me when she said that she would get going.

There was something about Charlotte's smile that put my mind at ease.

It might be because she was the first person I saw when I got there.

Charlotte's mere existence meant a lot to me.

Alright…

Things that I actually wanted to happen didn't happen, and events and incidents were popping up in front of me when I least expect or even considered that they might happen. Dealing with those things would only lead to unexpected results.

In the end, I didn't find out what happened for her to stop sending letters, but it was clear that it was over and done with.

As for the Magic Research Society, we just needed to wait for those results.

I had yet to hear from Bertus regarding the Rotary Gang's new business as well.

That problem with Charlotte had also been settled for the moment. It was clear that things had gotten better just when things had gotten worse.

* * *

“O-oh! I can feel something!”

“How is it?"

“I need to go, I really need to shit.”

“…”

-Hit!

“Ack! Why did you hit me? Why did you hit my head? Will you take responsibility if I turn stupid?”

“…Can you even get more stupid?”

Ellen stared at me with her eyes narrowed. Her Magic Body Strengthening training didn’t really make any sense to me, so that was all she would say.

“Y-you, aren’t you being too fucking harsh? I’m gonna cry, ya hear? At this age! Do you wanna fucking see that? Huh?”

I, who was in my thirties, would actually start crying after getting hit by a 17-year-old! Just who would want to see that?

"Shut up, hurry up and go to the bathroom.”

I didn’t make any progress in my Magic Body Strengthening training.

After I went to the bathroom, I sat back down together with Ellen and resumed my training.

“Here.”

-Glooow...



Ellen's whole body was enveloped by blue magical power, even her eyes were shining blue. Ellen was showing me her Magic Body Strengthening as if asking me to copy her.

"By the way, I've been wondering, you know… Can you actually use this as a light source when it gets too dark?"

"…I haven't tried. And stop talking nonsense. Hurry up and copy me."

"Don't you get that I keep spouting this nonsense because I just don't understand how it's done?"

"I don't. Hurry up and sit down."

Ellen stared at me as if she was ready to hit me with her magically strengthened fist if I said any more nonsense, so I sat across from her, afraid I would piss myself.

"And you over there as well."

"…Me?

"Who else is there besides you?"

She even called Cliffman, who had been beating up a scarecrow on his own, with a single hand gesture, and sat him down as he wore a rather nervous expression on his face.

"Well, I seriously don't get…"

"Try it. You might as well."

"…I really can't."

"If you don't get it, doesn't that mean you'll never get it?"

"Th-that's not it!"

* * *

"You'll have to learn it someday. Just think of this as studying ahead of time."

Cliffman was basically pretty unsociable. Dealing with other people seemed to exhaust him a lot more mentally. He was unsociable in a different way than Ellen.

The one he had the most difficulty with was Ellen. While I wasn't sure when it started, at some point, he didn't just seem to find it difficult to deal with her, he'd actually started to get scared of Ellen.

I believe it started around the time when I got caught up in that whole Corrupted Tiamata debacle.

He struggled like a mouse before a snake when faced with Ellen, and sometimes, without even meaning to, he would end up being overly polite towards her.

As such, the usual training room visitors were training to realize Magic Body Strengthening under Ellen's tutelage, however, both Cliffman and I showed zero results.

Well…

If the goal of the Magic Research Society was to raise the strength of the magic major students, Ellen was also just trying to teach us her own way of strengthening her body with magical power.

"Erm… It's said that if you use this technique incorrectly, you would end up getting seriously injured…"

One might get gravely hurt if one did what we were taught, not the teacher.

Cliffman tried his utmost to express his refusal, however, Ellen just shook her head.

"You two aren't at the level yet where you could hurt yourself."

"…"

"…"

If one were to get injured while poorly controlling one's magical power, that would mean that one could at least control one's magical power.

Both Cliffman and I couldn't say anything against Ellen's verbal attack saying that we

first had to know how to do something with which we could hurt ourselves, so we didn't have anything to worry about for now.

"You… Sometimes you talk pretty harshly, you know?"

"That's true."

In the end, what she said was true, so neither Cliffman nor I could say anything more.

* * *

I planned on being a little more active starting from the second semester, which was why I started doing various things.

My only worry was that Ludwig would only get stronger after going through various ordeals, but there were a lot of plot points missing, so I was slightly concerned about what would happen if Ludwig didn't manage to get as strong as I'd planned, but I deemed that worry to be useless.

That guy actually got stronger the less he had to do.

And if things really didn't work out, I could still make Ludwig stronger with all the knowledge I possessed.

There wasn't only one type of event that I was aware of. While it might change the future, I could still use the events that were available to me.

Those events were variable.

However, there were some events that would happen no matter what I did, just like there were some that would absolutely never happen no matter what I did.

I was going to lay my hands on those little by little.

Basically, Temple was equipped with protective barriers and anti-magic measures, however, incidents and accidents would just end up happening constantly. I mean, if there weren't, it would be difficult to move the plot forward, so some parts of it had to be more lax.

Otherwise, nothing would happen in that perfectly safe school environment other

than going to class.

Fights between students…

Evil outside forces…

Or inner strife…

Originally, I was planning on letting things run their course without interfering.

However, as soon as I found out that Ludwig would actually grow a lot stronger through self-improvement as long as nothing happened, I came to the conclusion that it would be fine if I took some preemptive measures in case of such incidents in his stead.

In other words, I was acting as the protagonist in order to reduce the burden on Ludwig, the actual protagonist.

Ludwig didn't have to be the protagonist of this world. He wasn't important, but the Gate Incident was. That was the only thing that had to get resolved. Like that, Ludwig wouldn't have to go through pain and suffering to grow stronger. There were some things that would definitely happen later on anyway, so there was no reason to let him suffer through those unnecessary things before then.

If Ludwig were a coward and would only be able to shake off that cowardice after going through a certain process, I would have let those events happen, but Ludwig was a very righteous guy from the get-go.

He wouldn't be one to run away out of fear in the face of battle. He was someone who would do everything in his might if he had to. Even if he just kept getting stronger through ordinary training, he would be able to carry his own weight later on.

I'd already taken measures to strengthen the magic major students.

There were a lot of ways through which the combat major students would be able to get even stronger as well.

And those ways would be beneficial for me as well, unlike the measures I took for the magic major students.

In my first semester, I'd focused on strengthening myself, and during my vacations, I'd also gotten the Holy Sword Tiamata, which I could bring with me wherever I wanted.

In my second semester, I'd turned my attention to something other than me, people, and events.

If there was something that would happen anyway, I should use everything I had to reduce the damage it would cause, and if it was something that was preventable depending on my behavior, I should consider the gravity of the incident and the impact it would have if I decided to prevent it from happening or let it go.

Of course, that didn't mean I would neglect my basic training.

I had to do a lot more while still maintaining what I had been doing.

My comprehension of Magic Body Strengthening wasn't really progressing, though it would be a lot stranger if my progress was fast. I didn't think I was a genius, after all.

Using Self-Suggestion, believing that I was a master over magical power, didn't really work. However, I still kept going, feeling that it would work out somehow, and it also had been less than a month since I started training to strengthen my body using magical power.

Although I don't know if I should call these things projects, anyway, these were my five projects:

The Edina Islands business.

The Gang's new business.

The Magic Research Society.

Magic Body Strengthening training.

Interfering with future events.

And lastly…

The Alpha and Omega of everything.

The achievement points.

[Achievement Points : 2,430]

Of the original 6,430 points, I'd used 4,000 achievement points to awaken a new talent, Mana Control.

Talents were inherently rare, so I was a rather talent-rich person having three of them.

At the beginning of the first semester, I only had infinite aptitudes, but now I had three talents. I even had a supernatural power, which was incredibly rare, that was why I kept on calling Ellen a genius.

Magic Body Strengthening wasn't actually something possible for a teenager, to begin with. Even those that were talented would only be able to use it after long periods of training.

Even in that place, where only talented people gathered, Magic Body Strengthening was a power that only a few would be able to realize. In fact, there were a lot of students that had no idea how to do it until their graduation.

So it wasn't strange that I didn't have a single clue even while possessing all the essential talents, Mana Sensitivity and Mana Control. Ellen was just extraordinary.

Still, even if the skill was beyond me that year, I was sure I would be able to do it next year.

Anyway, I didn't really need any further talents at that point.

It would have been nice to have a weapon-related talent, but I didn't really have any particular one I wanted, and the level of my swordsmanship kept on rising due to my training with Ellen.

Furthermore, the achievement points to acquire my next talent would be double 4,000 points, 8,000 points.

What really mattered were the achievement points as-is, though.

Whether I used them for Revisions or Previews, or, although I had never done that, to add settings or whatever.

To me, they were more important than money, especially because I wasn't sure what might happen, so I'd kept a large amount of them for quite a long period of time, however, I had spent a lot of them this time around.

They had a lot of uses, so I wanted to save up a lot of them in case something unexpected happened.

There were no quests or events I could complete at the moment, so there was only one way for me to earn achievement points…

Just by completing challenges.

[List of Challenges]

[Take control of the Edina Islands - 40,000 Points]

[Take over the Imperial Capital's underworld - 20,000 Points]

[(Festival) Win the Open Tournament - 15,000 Points]

[(Festival)Win the First-Year Tournament - 10,000 Points]

[Place first in the overall midterm exam - 8,000 Points]

Unlike before, there were a lot of additional challenges that gave a lot of points, as well as ones related to the festival. That was the second semester's main event, after all.

But why did they give so many points? What the hell was up with that? Taking control of the Edina Islands? I mean, Airi was there, but they were actually telling me

to take over the whole country right that instant, weren't they?

If I remembered right, there was once a challenge that asked me to slap the Emperor. Were the top challenges always things I couldn't possibly achieve at the moment?

What about taking over the Imperial Capital's underworld? I had no idea what might happen if I decided to do that.

[(Festival) Become Miss Temple - 1,100 points](Doesn't have to be achieved with Reinhardt's appearance.)

[(Festival) Become Mr. Temple - 1,000 points]

[(Festival) Win the Cross-dressing Contest - 1,100 points]

And what the fuck was that?

I understood the part about becoming Mr. Temple, but why was there a challenge telling me to become Miss Temple?!

And why did that give me 100 more points than becoming Mr. Temple?

That bastard was telling me to do what I did last time! That fucker wanted me to transform with the ring or whatever!

And a Cross-dressing Contest? Why did that give me 1,100 points as well?

Fuck off!

[(Festival) Become Miss Temple - 1,500 points]

[(Festival) Win the Cross-dressing Contest - 1,500 points]

…What the?

Did the number of points I would get as a reward change right in front of my nose?

You won't do it for 1,100 points? Is that so? How about 1,500?

That was what that ass was doing, right?

I'm not fucking doing it, okay?

[(Festival) Become Miss Temple - 2,000 points]

[(Festival) Win the Cross-dressing Contest - 2,000 points]

The numbers changed yet again right in front of me.

No.

Did that fucker want to see me dressed up as a woman or using the ring take part in the 'Miss' pageant that bad?

'I'm not fucking doing it, ya hear?!'

[(Festival) Become Miss Temple - 4,000 points]

[(Festival) Win the Cross-dressing Contest - 4,000 Points]

"God damn it."

Why was that bastard so generous when it came to shit like that?

‘4,000 points? I wouldn’t do it even if you gave me 40,000 points!’

W-well, if it actually gave me 40,000 points… with that many points, I might be able to change the future, right…?

That… Should be enough, right?

Would, that guy… give me 40,000?

[□□]

…Yeah, that bastard wouldn’t, right?

Perhaps thinking that giving me 40,000 points crossed the line, the rewarded points didn’t change to 40,000.

As I looked further, I seemed to find even more challenges that only seemed to serve to deal me mental damage. There were also challenges related to the midterm exam, nothing seemed different from before.

As I had already failed that one once, I didn’t plan on touching it again.

That was all there was to those challenges after all.

They were either too difficult for me to beat or scarring. It was full of strange things like sneaking out of Temple in the middle of the night or getting drunk in the dormitory until I passed out, and the number of points I would get for those was really small.

And…

[Get your first kiss - 500 points]

“…”

Why was that there?

And…

[Fight against the Orbis Class - 500 Points]

Now that bastard was just blatantly encouraging me to actually become a delinquent.

CHAPTER 207

I was somewhat troubled that the achievement points I'd piled up little by little were spent in one shot. I'd spent a lot of them to get a talent before I'd started my Magic Body Strengthening training.

However, since I didn't know when some kind of incident might happen, I needed to always save up a certain amount of achievement points just in case.

So, to make up for the points lost, I tried to collect some through challenges…

If I were to win the first-year tournament, I would get a huge amount of points, but I decided to consider it an impossible feat for the moment.

Ellen, who was originally supposed to be the winner, had announced that she wouldn't participate the other day, but there certainly were participants a lot stronger than me. There was Scarlett, Bertus, and Cliffman, while they couldn't even come close to Ellen, they were definitely stronger than me.

Of course, I could ask them not to participate as a favor.

However, even if I persuade those three to not participate, I was sure to get crushed by the Orbis Class students.

As such…

With great regret, I had to admit that none of the challenges, except those having to do with delinquent behavior and such, were possible for me.

And on top of that…

[(Festival) Become Miss Temple - 4000 Points]

[(Festival) Win the cross-dressing contest - 4000 Points]

[Get your first kiss - 500 Points]

[Fight against the Orbis Class - 500 Points]

Those four…

With great sadness in my heart, I had to admit that it was more likely for me to become Miss Temple or win the cross-dressing contest than to become Mr. Temple! It wasn't that impossible to conceal my identity with Sarkegaar's ring!

My appearance as Reinhardt was pretty good, but it wasn't the best in all of Temple.

Well, since the cross-dressing contest was only for those that actually prepared for it, I felt like there might be fewer contestants.

Of course, I didn't care about any of them, though.

However, trying to get my first kiss or fighting against the Orbis Class was just as strange. It was my first kiss! Were they telling me to just randomly get it from anywhere?!

Those challenges seemed giddy to turn me into a complete weirdo for some reason.

Normally, challenges should have been something difficult to achieve, but were those challenges made to be as strange as possible instead?

What did that bastard want me to participate in the cross-dressing contest for?!

It would have been better if I didn't check. That was why I didn't regularly go through the list of challenges—it only ever contained those kinds of challenges.

If I suddenly went up and fought with Orbis Class students, those bastards, it was more than obvious that those punks wouldn't just sit around and respond to my actions.

But why would I even do that?

While I was known as a mad dog all around the place, that didn't really fit with my

principle.

If someone didn't touch me first, I wouldn't beat them up.

I mean, I had no real justification. I would never move unless I had some basic justification to do so. If they didn't pick a fight with me first, I sure as hell wouldn't go and pick one with them.

I didn't want to do something like that.

Getting my first kiss…

That wasn't something I could just do either.

'I should just stop thinking about this.'

Those challenges were bound to be trash or just crazy, no matter what!

As such…

I decided to not tackle any of the challenges.

I only had a few achievement points left, but it wasn't like I needed them right then, and there wasn't some kind of life-threatening crisis lurking around the corner, either.

By the way…

"…Sigh, seriously… What should I do about my swordsmanship class? That bastard's gonna bully me again…"

Erich de Lafaeri talking to the other two idiot brothers in the dormitory lobby caught my eye yet again.

"Why don't you just tell the teacher about this?"

"Right. How long do you want to get bullied by that guy?"

Kono Lint and Cayer were trying to persuade the deflated Erich.

“No, that’s not the problem here. If we have sparring duels, he’d just continue to beat me up… And I can’t really do anything about that… And the other students who are taking the class with us… just laugh at me…”

“They are such jerks.”

“That teacher is far too irresponsible.”

Recently, Erich de Lafaeri had been getting bullied throughout his swordsmanship class because he’d messed with one of the Orbis Class guys.

That guy’s bullying itself wasn’t actually the problem.

As the one getting beat up was someone from Royal Class, it seemed like the other ordinary Class students ignored him or ridiculed him.

To put it simply, he was getting mobbed.

As I watched those three indignant brothers, it suddenly occurred to me.

The justification I had been looking for…

It was staring me in the face.

“Hey, you punk.”

“Huh… Oh? R-Reinhardt? What?”

As I approached him, he flinched and started to stutter. It was only natural to get scared if a crazy bastard appeared right when you were talking about one.

“Hey, that asshat that’s been bullying you… Let me meet him.”

I clenched my fist and gave him a sly smile.

“I’ll take care of the guy for you.”

Some bastard was bullying one of my classmates.

Wasn't that justification enough?

"Huuh?"

"Y-you?"

"Seriously?!"

All three of them looked at me as if they'd just found a ray of light in their moment of darkness.

They seemed to think that it was good and all that I'd decided to step up, but still questioned whether I really meant it.

That was fine, but couldn't they hide their shock a little at least?

I was just doing it for some achievement points, but it looked rather different from the outside.

The expressions of those three were a sight to behold when they heard that Reinhardt, the mad dog, had decided to step up to avenge his classmate who had been beaten up by Orbis Class students.

Those guys, who got scared shitless whenever I spoke to them, looked at me as if there wasn't anyone more reliable than me in the world.

* * *

This wasn't about winning the fight or something.

I might actually lose because I didn't who the guy was. If he was the top student of the Orbis Class, I'd absolutely lose.

However, the condition of the challenge was to fight them.

It didn't matter whether I won or lost. I would feel like shit if I lost, but it wasn't like I would die.

It was by far better to just get beaten up than to participate in a cross-dressing contest or turn into a real girl and participate in that school beauty pageant!

I wasn't sure if Olivia Lanze would participate, but I felt like I could actually beat her.

Furthermore, the Orbis Class was holding both a leading as well as supporting role in many parts, so there was reason enough for me to properly look them over once.

Anyway…

The fight would give me 500 points.

There was a similar challenge in my first semester as well. At that time, I hadn't even known that there was a challenge related to that and had just beat Cayer up, which had ending up completing the challenge. Kind of ridiculous.

With the intent to strike the iron when it was hot, I took the three incompetent brothers along with me.

Erich de Lafaeri, Kono Lint, and Cayer Vioden…

Those three were following behind me.

That made it seem as if I was the leader of those three incompetent brothers.

No, come to think of it, wasn't I just slightly different from those guys? Some of my aspects were worse than theirs were.

The leader of the three idiot brothers…

Reinhardt, the mad dog.

I actually had all the attributes to be seen as their leader. Was that what they called fate?

If it wasn't for those achievement points, I wouldn't have had a reason to do it, and I would have never imagined until five minutes beforehand that I would be dragging those guys around like henchmen.

"A-are you really going to be okay? He's really…"

“What of it? Even if I lose, it doesn’t really matter. I’ll just get someone stronger to take care of this.”

If I could be considered their boss, I would also have someone who was like my boss who had my back.

Ellen Artorius…

-If I get beaten up, big sis Ellen will take care of everything! So don’t be scared!

-Kuhuk, that guy, Reinhardt, was just the mid-boss!?

-The strongest first year of Royal Class, Miss Ellen Artorius, will deal with those bastards!

I wouldn’t actually say that, though.

Anyway, even if I were to lose, that was how things would roughly turn out.

“But… Where are we going?”

Cayer, a little frightened, hesitantly posed a question.

“Where do you think we would be going if we wanted to beat up some Orbis Class kids?”

I pointed at one of the stops on the tram route map.

[Orbis Class Dormitory]

“Y-you’re going there directly?”

“What? Should I just go to Main Street and yell ‘Come out, you Orbis Class Bastards!’ then?”

Wasn’t it only natural to knock on their front door if one was looking for someone?

At that moment, all of them realized that we were about to enter the tiger’s den, so their faces grew pale. We were about to wander into the middle of the enemy’s camp after all.

They knew that I was a crazy bastard, but when they heard that we would be going straight to the Orbis Class' dorm, they seemed to want to go back as fast as possible.

"If you want to go back, then go. It doesn't really matter whether I go alone or you come with."

I told them that with my arms folded as we waited for the tram. Those guys seemed kind of worried when they heard me say that they could go back.

"Go back, and just live like that for the rest of your fucking life."

Go back…

Go back, and continue to live like cowards.

I didn't know what they felt when they heard those light words of mine, but one of them said that they would go back.

* * *

The day was Thursday.

On Friday, some of the students might go back home or go out to play, but in all likelihood, our targets would remain in the dormitory. If not, we could just wait for them there.

The Orbis Class Dormitory was on the opposite end of Temple, far away from the Royal Class Dormitory. Unless we ran into each other on Main Street, in a lecture, or went close to their dorm, we would never encounter Orbis Class students.

Of course, I regularyly saw the Orbis Class kids running in rows during my morning training with Adriana, which covered the entire ground of Temple.

The students of Royal Class would just train on their own terms, but Orbis Class acted as one unit.

—That was why they were able to easily annihilate people like Erich, who had talents but didn't put in any effort.

As we rode the tram to the Orbis Clas,s Erich was restless on the entire ride.

"B-but Reinhardt… Even if you win, won't he get even angrier instead…? What if things just get worse?"

What did that guy want from me?

I didn't really care if he got beaten up or not to begin with. I only did it because that guy gave me a reason to stick to.

"…What? I even have to take care of the aftermath?"

"N-no. Th-that's not… erm…"

When I glared at him with wide eyes, he backed off with his tail between his legs. Cayer and Kono Lint also seemed skeptical, perhaps because they also suspected that the situation might just get worse after I whooped that guy's ass. I sat on my tram seat, folded my arm,s and sighed.

"Do you think the guy bullying you is a fucking bastard?"

"…O-of course…"

"Then if you think like that, why did you do this to someone else?"

That guy had been slapping the back of Scarlett's head and picking on her for no apparent reason. While that was no longer possible for him, Erich actually became a victim of bullying himself.

Erich wore a bitter expression because he knew what I was talking about. He wouldn't have known while he was the one bullying. How the victim would feel.

He had to go to swordsmanship lectures almost every day. After his poor skill got revealed there, he got looked down on by not only the Orbis Class student, but by the normal class students as well.

I wondered whether Erich reflected on his actions and understood how it felt.

I didn't know though. Usually, people like that tend not to remember what they did before. The worse they were, the more they would pretend as though nothing had happened. They'd just say something like "Did I do that?"

"…"

Erich didn't say anything.

I didn't know if he actually felt guilty, but it seemed like he at least felt something.

"No. Actually, it's not your fault. It should be the fault of the person who made you do that."

Just as Scarlett was the victim of those weird settings I'd come up with, Erich was also a victim because I'd made him the main perpetrator of this strange setting.

Every problem in this world originated from me and would eventually end up biting me in the ass. What I criticized Erich for was, after all, something akin to a boomerang.

"Did you just curse out my parents?"

However, Erich ended up raising his voice ever so slightly at that.

Ah…

No, that wasn't what I meant, though?

Well, but if one heard that without any context, it would definitely sound like I was bad-mouthing his parents, wouldn't it? The ones who made him do something like that, of course, would be his parents, right?

Kono Ling and Cayer also looked rather shocked because I'd suddenly started flaming him.

You really don't have a bottom line, do you? That was what their expressions seemed to say.

"That's not what I meant. I'm sorry if it sounded like that."

"You're too much…"

Erich was just passively mumbling things like that, so I just apologized because one could misunderstand what I said rather easily depending on the way one took it.

No.

But come to think of it, wasn't it a privilege to actually have parents and a wealthy family that could be bad-mouthed?

I had neither, you know?

"You know, fuck it. I don't have none and I'm not even allowed to say that to you, who has everything?"

"…Huh?"

"Ain't that right? I heard that those fuckers who have everything want even more. Ain't it such a fucked up world we live in? Huh?"

"N-no, but you're the one who said that, so why did you get mad all of a sudden…?"

Their faces became something to behold when I started to cuss him out all of a sudden after I apologized.

You have it much better than me who has nothing, so shouldn't you hold it in a bit more even if I bad-mouthed your parents?

Even I thought that this was complete bullshit.

No, I didn't actually bad mouth his parents, though.

CHAPTER 208

The atmosphere of the Orbis Class' dormitory was slightly different from the Royal Class' dormitory.

The Royal Class' dormitory, with its path lined with columns leading to the entrance, felt like a huge temple in a way. Its architectural style felt curvy and rounded.

The dormitory of the Orbis Class felt a little stiff, however.

I wouldn't call it crude, as it still was a magnificent building.

If the Royal Class' dormitory felt like a splendid temple, then Orbis Class' felt like a castle.

A serene castle.

That heavy, overbearing architectural style already made us feel the atmosphere that enveloped the whole Orbis Class.

While the Royal Class was more free-spirited, the Orbis Class was a place where military-style discipline reigned supreme and hierarchies were very clear.

The building itself seemed to show that order and unity the Orbis Class valued.

It was a magnificent place, but it also seemed incredibly breathtaking.

"Wow… This is the first time I've been to this place… It's fascinating."

"I thought it would be similar to ours, but it's completely different."

Kono Lint and Cayer also expressed their appreciation. The atmosphere surrounding the dormitory buildings of the two classes was just as different as the classes. Unlike the other two, who were simply expressing their thoughts about the building, Erich seemed rather uneasy.

"Everyone is staring at us…"

“I guess so. We’re in our school uniforms, after all.”

Although there were only a few Orbis Class students, there were still some students who hung around the dormitory who had gotten used to only seeing the Orbis Class uniforms.

They passed by and stared at us. They didn’t talk to us or try to pick a fight, but they were looking at us as if they wanted to say something like “Why did they come here?”

They didn’t know us specifically, but they recognized the uniforms we were wearing.

We were faced with that pure hostility just because we were part of the Royal Class.

It was then that we realized that we were in a place filled with people who hated us.

Erich’s words seemed to have startled the other two. Feeling the enemy’s hostility in their gazes, it seemed to have finally hit them just where they were.

The Orbis Class, like the Royal Class, also only consisted of a small number of students. At most, there should’ve been around 130 people who were part of it.

The conflict between the Royal Class and the Orbis Class was one-sidedly caused by the Orbis Class.

In other words, the Orbis Class simply one-sidedly hated us, and because the students of the Royal Class felt that they hated them, they also started to dislike the Orbis Class.

The Royal Class didn’t have a need to surpass anyone. There were only some individuals who didn’t see the need to put in any effort, but if they overcame their own laziness and worked hard, they would be able to achieve outstanding achievements in their respective fields of study.

Since they had no one set as their ‘goal’, the Royal Class didn’t see the need to use something like the feeling of inferiority or hatred towards someone else to use as stepping stones to promote the students’ growth.

However, the Orbis Class practically forced their students to see the Royal Class as an enemy to overcome.

So it was only natural for them to act that way.

All the students coming and going, regardless of whether they were seniors or in the same grade as us, reacted as if we were invaders who had entered their territory.

“You look like you’re in the lower grades. What’s going on here? Didn’t your seniors teach you that you won’t have a good end if you recklessly waltz into the Orbis Class?”

Judging by the other students’ hostile gazes, it was only natural for someone who appeared to be a senior to appear before us and tell us something like that.

Their momentum was kind of crude, but it seemed to be a warning. They didn’t know why we’d gone there, but they were telling us to get the fuck out because we would only be met with hostility.

He seemed to act considerate because we looked like we were in the lower grades.

He was a handsome guy with blonde hair and golden eyes.

When someone who appeared to be a senior suddenly approached us and said something like that, those three immediately got scared.

“I’m here to fight someone.”

“…What?”

Of course, I wasn’t scared at all.

* * *

I might win, I might lose, I might get beaten up like a dog.

But so what? The shame of defeat and humiliation were nothing. I wouldn’t end up dying, after all.

I didn’t know if I could call that a major growth in terms of my mentality, but after visiting the Darklands, there had been a clear change inside of me.

I had already seen what lay beyond mere violence. I’d seen people rise from the dead

and had cut the necks of these corpses rushing at me and smashed their heads in.

Winning or losing in that kind of fight was just that, after all. There was no reason to feel happy about winning or despair over losing.

Even though I had said that I'd come to take revenge for my classmate who got beaten up by someone, those weren't my true intentions.

I was there to earn achievement points.

That was all.

B-but since I had undergone such big mental changes, shouldn't it be fine dressing up as a woman and taking part in that beauty pageant to get some points…?

No.

That was just a little…

It was something that far surpassed humiliation and shame.

I didn't think I could handle that! I could easily take a beating, though! Anyway, while my mentality had changed, I couldn't handle something of that level yet! It felt like I'd lose something else other than my life if I did that. I was still traumatized after playing with Kono Lint's feelings. I didn't want to do that again!

"…You're here to fight someone?"

"Yes."

That person, who seemed to be a senior in the Orbis Class, seemed rather dumbfounded by my nonchalant comment that I had come to fight someone.

"I'm Reinhardt, Royal Class' Number 11 of Year 1 Class A. To be exact, this friend here seems to be getting bullied by a first-year of the Orbis Class for no reason, so I personally came here to resolve the situation."

I explained my purpose with no hesitation to that senior's face, who wasn't even part of the Royal Class, but the Orbis Class. All three of the idiot brothers were looking at me with admiration in their eyes as I proudly stated that I had come to fight with one

of the first-years.

A bastard among bastards. He's the real deal.

That was what their expressions seemed to say.

"Bullying?"

"Yeah, I wanted to leave it alone for some time, but it seemed to be pretty serious. So could you go and call that guy?"

"…"

That senior just stood there and looked at me and the three others alternately.

He seemed to be beyond bewildered and even a little interested now.

"Okay. I'm not going to order you around when you're here to solve your personal problems. I'll get the guy for you. Who is it?"

Right…

Come to think of it, I hadn't even asked who he was. I wasn't even the slightest bit curious about who was bullying Erich because I didn't even care about whether I won or lost.

When I looked towards Erich, he hesitantly opened his mouth.

"It's… Orbis Class Year 1 Class A Number 5 Lilka Aaron."

"Ah."

…Wasn't that the name of a female student?

* * *

Orbis Class A-5 of Year 1. Lilka Aaron.

She wasn't someone that had any screen time. Nilssonia and Adler Belkin, who took swordsmanship classes with me, had some importance, as they fought against

Ludwig at the beginning of the second semester, but that girl didn't even have that kind of role—She was outside of the scope of the original story.

It was somewhat understandable why Erich just kept on getting beat up by that girl and didn't even try to tell a teacher.

I was more than sure that he felt ashamed that he'd got beaten up by a girl. Even Kono Lint and Cayer didn't seem to know that it was a female student up until then.

No. But why the hell would he be ashamed of that?

To begin with, wasn't Ellen the strongest first year in the Royal Class? Did that not matter?

I was getting beat up by her every day, but I didn't feel the least bit ashamed, I was just grateful.

…To be honest, sometimes I got annoyed, though.

Anyway, that was what one called useless pride.

The Orbis Class senior who called out to us was a fourth-year. Even though we belonged to the Royal Class, he didn't seem to be that upset about our request because we were first-years.

Some first-years came to get some revenge for bullying them in a so-called confrontation.

That concept itself seemed quite strange and interesting.

Unlike the Royal Class, the Orbis Class operated like an army.

"Gilliot!"

"3-B-4 Gilliot! Present!"

The senior, who introduced himself as a fourth-year, made a passing junior sprint over to him with a single word.

I didn't know what 3-B-4 meant, but it seemed like they were stating their position if

put into military terms, right?

Was he saying that he was the Number 4 of Year 3 Class B?

Looking at the junior who approached us at a quick pace, he pointed towards the Orbis Class dormitory.

"Make the first-years gather in the public training hall. All of them."

"Yes!"

Without even asking why, as soon as that order was issued, the guy disappeared towards the dormitory, sprinting at top speed.

-Good day!

-Good day!

When I thought of it, I saw a lot of juniors who would bow at a 90-degree angle to greet their seniors on our way.

The atmosphere there was so different from the Royal Class. All three of the idiot brothers stiffened at the sight of that.

In fact, it seemed like they got even more scared seeing the Orbis Class go about things like that.

"Let's go, guys. Everyone's going to gather up now."

And while he spoke in a commanding tone to his juniors, he spoke rather gently to us.

There was something even more frightening about that.

* * *

The Royal Class also had that public training hall that the unknown senior mentioned. However, I had never been there because each dormitory floor had a training room in their annex. There probably weren't many students of the Royal Class made use of it, either.

Since we'd gone there and went straight to the training hall as they were gathering up, we should have been the first to arrive there, but the first-years had already arrived there as if they had used some kind of magic.

Perhaps they'd rushed there as soon as they heard someone say, "Gather up!", I could see a lot of them holding their breath, keeping their mouths shut.

Apparently, it was the place the seniors used to discipline their juniors.

The Orbis Class' public training hall was definitely well-used.

The worn floor, the training swords that showed signs of heavy use, and the multiple scratches on the scarecrows were evidence of that.

Those that worried that the seniors were going to beat them up to punish them suddenly realized that the situation was completely different from what they expected when they saw their senior bringing us wearing our Royal Class uniforms to the training grounds.

There were about twenty people gathered there, including us.

Maybe those were all of Orbis Class' first-years.

There were four of us.

And there was also the fourth-year senior who'd ordered them to gather up.

I also saw Nilssonia and Adler Belkin, with whom I was already acquainted with. Both of them had their eyes wide open, having no idea why I was there.

I had gone to the Orbis Class to gather achievement points, but there were other reasons as well.

Starting from the second semester, the Orbis Class would start getting more involved in the main plot. I also had the personal desire to see what kinds of guys the characters I'd described were.

The starting point would be the festival, so no matter whether I intervened then or not, those guys and the Royal Class were destined to be intertwined.

The clash between the Orbis Class and the Royal Class was bound to eventually happen, no matter what I did.

There was someone among them who was supposed to be the villain of the second semester arc, but later became Ludwig's rival.

Of course, I couldn't just immediately recognize him just by seeing his face. Although I had described his looks, I couldn't remember everything, and even if I did, I couldn't actually draw up a face from just a few lines of writing in my head.

However, there were people who can be recognized by their atmosphere alone.

The guy who was just watching the situation with calm eyes even though he was suddenly called there stood out to me.

He was the only one that didn't seem nervous at all.

That might actually be Grayden Amorell, Year 1 Class A's Number 1 of the Orbis Class. He was the strongest of the Orbis Class' first years.

His role was to overwhelmingly beat Ludwig during the festival before losing to Ellen.

However, just like Ellen was a real monster, that guy was as well. I was no match for him at the moment.

If he'd been the one that'd bullied Erich, I would have unconditionally lost to him, but as it Lilka Aaron who did it, that wasn't necessarily the case.

He had a cynical and cold personality. At first, he seemed similar to Ellen, but he was completely different from her.

That didn't mean he was a bad guy.

However, there was another guy I was paying close attention to.

He stood out like a sore thumb for different reasons than Grayden Amorell.

If Grayden stood out because he was really calm and not showing any nervousness, unlike the others, that guy was completely different.

His eyes seemed kind of unstable. Something about that bastard was just a bit off. The feel about him was slightly different from Dettomolian or Anna de Gerna.

That bastard's eyes made it look like he would end up causing a huge incident.

Obris Class Year 1 Class B Number 10.

The last place of the Orbis Class.

He was the real villain of the semester.

Ender Wilton…

I couldn't read that guy properly, but I could see in him as much as I knew.

Aside from the fear and nervousness caused by this assembly itself, I could see those twisted feelings of inferiority and blazing hatred in his eyes.

He was placed lowest in the Orbis Class, which valued hard work and training. He was in Class B Number 10 in a school where all the teachers and seniors were teaching them that they could overcome anything with effort alone.

In that place where their rankings were rearranged every semester, he had been B-10 for both the first and second semester.

He was slowly going crazy due to his utter disillusionment and ever-growing inferiority complex because he couldn't get stronger no matter how hard he tried.

In the original, that guy got defeated by Ludwig, the last place of the Royal Class, during the preliminary round of the festival's tournament.

Currently, Ludwig was overwhelmingly stronger, but in the original, he should have been completely defeated by B-3 Nilssonia during that spar.

Ludwig and that guy were the last ones to compete.

The battle between the strongest of the Royal Class and Orbis Class ended with the Royal Class' victory.

In the fight between the last places, he was also defeated.

He was never able to show any results, even though he tried, and he even lost to Ludwig, who was part of their rival class. As such, he was recognized as the weakest of the weak.

He had no talents, and although he wanted to overcome everything through effort, he couldn't even do that.

That guy eventually ended up going down the wrong path by dabbling in black magic to become stronger.

And in the first semester of his second year, he beat up everyone in the Orbis Class and rose up to Year 2 Class A Number 5.

Then he'd challenged Ludwig, who'd defeated and humiliated him during the festival, to a duel.

However, Ludwig didn't just play around either.

After losing to Grayden Amorell during the festival, he'd gone through rigorous training during his winter vacations, so Ludwig, who had become a second year, was a lot stronger than he was at the time of the festival.

Ender Wiltson became stronger, but Ludwig still ended up defeating him after some struggling.

He was defeated even though he'd resorted to black magic…

He was still the same as he was when he was in last place, the only difference being he'd gotten stronger through black magic, but that guy got stronger without any of that.

The only difference between them was that Ludwig had a talent while he didn't.

Ender Wilton despaired before that wall which he simply couldn't overcome, even by using forbidden powers, which eventually drove him crazy.

He became more and more dependent on black magic, and he couldn't stop himself, even though he knew that it was simply a shortcut to his own ruin.

Ludwig heard from Anna de Gerna, a gifted black magician who watched their duel,

that Ender Wilton seemed to have gotten involved with black magic, so she investigated him.

Eventually, Ludwig would find out that Ender Wilton had become stronger through a forbidden power and would try to stop him before he would cause bigger problems.

Ludwig would meet up with Ender Wilton alone.

It was to give him one last chance to turn back, even though he had already crossed the line so many times, but it didn't work

Ender Wilton had no intention of listening to him, after all, and when he realized that he was found out, he planned on killing Ludwig by stabbing him with a knife to keep his mouth shut.

However, he was just defeated yet again by the one who had beaten him so many times before.

And then he'd gone berserk.

Ender Wilton's body, which had been exposed to too much black magic, was left in an incredibly unstable state, so the black magical power dormant in his body started to overflow, turning him into a monster.

Ludwig fought him in his monster form engulfed in black magic, and after many twists and turns, he succeeded in killing Ender Wilton.

To summarize, there was a crazy bastard in Temple who tried to get strong by even using the power of black magic who had ended up turning into a monster which Ludwig got rid of.

That was it.

This wasn't only a major plot point but the start of another one.

How did Ender Wilton, a combat major student, get his hands on black magic?

Who was it that cast forbidden black magic on him?

That was what led to the next event.

The fake villain, Grayden Amorell.

And the real villain, Ender Wilton.

I checked both their faces.

Of course, while he wasn't present, the mastermind behind the curtains was a man named Aaron Medera, a spy of a secret magic society called the Black Order. That was an issue I would have to take care of later.

CHAPTER 209

Ender Wilton's fall to ruin…

As a result of that incident, rather than growing, Ludwig broke mentally.

No matter how much of a monster Ender had been, Ludwig has still ended up killing someone.

Ludwig reported the whole incident to Temple. While he wasn't punished for it, he eventually developed a trauma from the act of killing.

So Ludwig wasn't quite there mentally for quite some time, leading to a period of stagnation for him until he recovered.

There was only one conclusion…

I had to eliminate the incident having to do with Ender Wilton to make Ludwig even stronger than he was in the original. Like that, he wouldn't stagnate because of the mental breakdown he suffered from.

'What should I do?'

I couldn't come up with any countermeasures for that yet.

I needed to think about it more once the reason I was there in the first place was handled.

I first had to do some things to get achievement points to experiment. I also managed to confirm what Ender Wilton looked like.

-Clap!

The senior who brought us there smiled brightly, clapping his hands to attract everyone's attention.

"It's okay. As you can see, I didn't call you here to scold you, but because we have a

visitor. Don't be so nervous."

An unknown fourth-year senior…

He didn't tell us his name, but he seemed to be one extraordinary guy. He spoke briefly, looking at his first-year juniors who had been standing in two rows, frozen in fear.

"Lilka Aaron."

"1-A-5 Lilka Aaron!"

As soon as her name was called, a certain someone raised her hand.

"Come forward."

"Yes!"

When she was called forward, she immediately stood up and rushed towards us.

What did they do in half a year to turn those kids into soldiers already? Seeing those kids act like that should have made me cringe, but instead, I felt goosebumps running all over my body when seeing that they were so well-trained.

Orbis Class Year 1 A-5 Lilka Aaron…

She had brown hair and brown eyes.

She was about 154 cm tall.

She was rather small.

'…Erich, did you get beat up by her even though the physical difference between you two was so huge?'

Of course, if I compared myself to Ellen, it would seem that my physique was better, but I was still getting beat up.

But wasn't she a bit too small?

The atmosphere she gave off was rather sharp, but that just made her seem cute.

“I heard that you bullied a Royal Class student, so they came to get their revenge.”

“!”

Lilka Aaron’s eyes widened at these words. However, her gaze didn’t turn to Erich.

"Is that true?"

“…”

“Oh, do I have to ask you twice?”

“No! It’s true!”

It seemed like a normal question, but the fourth-year senior’s words seemed to have an unusual weight to them.

"Why did you do that?"

At that, Lilka Aaron cast her eyes on Erich. She seemed nervous because the seniors had suddenly gathered them there, but there were some other very obvious emotions visible in her eyes.

—Contempt, hatred, disgust…

And ridicule.

“That over there is Erich de Lafaeri, Year 1 A-9 of the Royal Class. He told me that, because students from the Orbis Class do not have a talent, all of the students from Royal Class would simply catch up to us eventually. I was merely checking to see if he had already caught up.”

That cold and calm atmosphere about her was further supplemented by her words.

Talent…

That word was the Orbis Class students’ trigger. I could feel the nervous atmosphere in the training hall turn to anger after hearing Lilka Aaron’s words.

I already knew that Erich had said something to that effect, but now that I was there, I realized what it meant if it was recounted in front of those guys who would hate to hear those words the most.

If the atmosphere were to be turned into some kind of attack, Erich would have died on the spot.

“Oh, is that so…?”

Even the senior who had brought us there seemed repulsed by those words. He glanced in Erich’s direction.

He wore a subtle smile. The emotions he seemed to feel were rather hard to guess, but anyway, Lilka Aaron’s words had completely changed the mood.

“Okay. Aaron. Whatever the reason, it seems like you still bullied the Royal Class student Erich, so a friend of Erich came here to seek revenge for the violence he suffered as his proxy.”

A proxy…

At those words, laughter erupted from the Orbis Class.

What a pathetic guy.

Did you bring a friend to do it for you because you couldn’t do anything on your own? He only got lucky by getting some talent.

Laughter and ridicule openly spread around the area and Erich seemed to get smaller and smaller in that atmosphere.

“You said your name was Reinhardt, right?”

“Yes.”

“It seems like he wants to get revenge on you, what are you going to do?”

Lilka Aaron…

She stared at me.

“I can deal with that guy however long he wants.”

The girl nodded with confidence permeating her face, not because she noticed the way her senior was looking at her. Due to mutual agreement on the matter from both sides, the senior nodded happily.

“Alright. Then there’s no reason to wait for much longer.”

He pulled Likla Aaron and me to face each other as if trying to mediate the situation.

“While this isn’t a duel, fights like these do need to have something at stake, right? Reinhardt, what will you promise if Aaron wins?”

Promise…

Well, what could I promise? I was just there as a proxy in response to some bullying, and then I had to promise something if I were to lose.

“Well… I don’t really care if you roast or stirfry that guy. I won’t report any of that to the teachers or anything.”

“Well, I don’t think these are particularly desirable conditions, though… Aaron, did Erich ever formally apologize for insulting his classmate and the whole of Orbis Class?”

“No, he didn’t.”

“Then, in the name of the whole Royal Class, apologize for the insults made against the Orbis Class. How is that?”

The senior tilted his head as he said that.

“I would if I could, but I don’t think that I can speak for the whole Royal Class. If I were the student council president, maybe, but I’m just a first-year student.”

I couldn’t speak for the whole Royal Class, but I could only apologize as one of its students.

“Hmm, is that so? Then all four of you who came here should sincerely apologize for the insults made by Erich de Lafaeri. How about that?”

Getting down on our knees…

Shattering the pride of Royal Class students—that was what the Orbis Class wanted. Trampling the Royal Class, standing on top of it.

Was that senior any different?

Lilka Aaron's eyes were shining, and Erich was already broken.

However, someone had appeared to take revenge for him. She seemed to think that I'd gone because I was insanely confident in my skills. So did she believe that, if she broke me, that she would truly surpass the Royal Class?

We had to get down on our knees if I lost.

"Hm, there'll be one more condition."

The fourth-year senior pointed to himself and grinned.

"If Lilka Aaron loses, I shall take responsibility by kneeling down and apologizing for the bad management of my juniors. Of course, I shall take care that Erich won't get bullied anymore in the future."

"!"

"!"

The atmosphere, which had reached its climax because of his previous words, froze over again.

What a lunatic.

I didn't imagine things would get that good.

He sure knew how to convince someone that one could never lose no matter what.

Lilka Aaron…

There was one more emotion added to the ones I could see reflected in her eyes as she was about to fight me.

—Utter fear.

It was a completely different matter for getting humiliated as a result of one's own defeat versus having others take responsibility for that loss.

The Orbis Class was almost like the army.

In a place like that, Lilka Aaron would fight as a result of her own actions, but she wasn't wagering her own honor or face, but her senior's.

If she won the duel, she would have won over the Royal Class completely, so there was a certain sense of fairness about it.

But what if she lost?

Because of her defeat, her senior would have to kneel in front of some first-years that were far below him, and even from the Royal Class to boot.

If that was all that would happen, it would still be fine. As a fighter who had tarnished her senior's reputation, Lilka Aaron had no idea what that senior would do to her. Even if that fourth-year didn't do anything, the second and third-years certainly wouldn't.

They would take care of everything that would come after.

It might not end with Lilka Aaron alone. It might extend to the whole first-year of Orbis Class.

There was no need for the guy to tell her "Don't lose."

* * *

'If you lose, I'll have to kneel down.'

That unknown fourth-year didn't only plant fear in Lilka Aaron but all the other first years as well.

You'd rather die than lose.

That was what he meant when he said that he would kneel down.

A strict hierarchy between seniors and juniors—a system that was similar to the one of the army.

Its absurdity was even more terrible than the efficiency it held.

That violent and absurd system of the Orbis Class was what led Ender Wilton to ruin and eventually turned him into a monster.

A desire for strength and an inferiority complex—Those were what I had written as the reasons for the outcome, but when I saw it in person, I felt like it was actually a lot different.

Ender Wilton would have been placed under a lot of pressure by his seniors as well because he was in last place. Judging by the atmosphere, it was more than certain that the seniors actually beat up their juniors.

The atmosphere hanging over the Orbis Class was certainly even more eerie when I actually went to their dormitory.

Even though I was a complete outsider, I felt suffocated by the fear and pressure those guys felt.

As the fight was about to begin, the fourth-year senior led the three idiot brothers to the edge of the training hall.

Naturally, the space around Lilka Aaron and me was completely emptied.

It wasn't a practice match, it was a fight. It wasn't my intention for an audience to be around, but it wasn't entirely unexpected.

The senior raised his voice.

"A Declaration of surrender or incapacitation."

"Let's make these the losing conditions."

"Let us not only look at their skills but their grit as well."

"Well then, First Year Royal Class A-11 Reinhardt and Orbis Class A-5 Lilka Aaron… Wait, this is a fight, right? Oh well, then let's just get started."

At first glance, they seemed like ordinary words said before a duel, but I could see all the Orbis Class students flinching at them.

Hard work and perseverance.

Those were the most important virtues imposed on the students of the Orbis Class.

Those losing conditions, a Declaration of surrender or incapacitation, only meant one thing:

If they surrendered, something much more terrifying would await them afterwards.

Even if they thought they wouldn't be able to win, they were forced to fight until they were incapacitated.

I could see strong determination bruning in Lilka Aaron's eyes as well as fear equivalent to it.

I can't lose.

I can't lose. I can't lose. I can't lose.

I can't.

It seemed like she was constantly repeating that to herself.

Was that really the one who bullied Erich de Lafaeri? That little girl was like a cat bristling up its fur, its claws out and its eyes gleaming, but she didn't actually seem to look at me because she was so focused on what would happen after her defeat.

It was just pitiful.

I could either lose or win.

There was a chance I might lose or I might win, but I didn't actually care about the result. If I lost, I just would have to work a bit harder, and if I won, I just had to stay vigilant.

However, if one thought that there was an "After" if one lost, people would be on the verge of collapse even before the fight started.

We hadn't even fought yet, but she was already half-defeated.

That method would make one desperate, but was that the right way to help someone grow?

Did that girl know about me?

She probably did.

Adler Belkin was overwhelmingly defeated by me using my supernatural power. The Orbis Class was a little different from the Royal Class. Two such differences were the atmosphere between seniors and juniors and the atmosphere inside each class.

However, not everything was bad about all of that.

Those guys underwent rigorous training and lived under strict rules.

Most of the time, students would grow very close under such conditions.

Those guys had a very strong sense of camaraderie between them. They had no other choice but to—faced with those harsh rules and their hard everyday life.

So they most definitely internally shared information about the Royal Class students who they designated as their rivals.

She should have already heard information about me. That was why Lilka Aaron was looking at me quite nervously even though I was Number 11, two places below Number 9, Erich.

"Hey, how strong are you really?"

What was my real level of skill in the Royal Class?

I'd told Adler Belkin that I was the weakest. Of course, that wasn't actually the case. Among the combat talents of Royal Class, how would I be ranked?

Even if I used my supernatural power, these four had a definite advantage over me:

Ellen, Cliffman, Bertus, Scarlett.

Although I had never crossed swords with Bertus before, I simply knew just by looking at him.

While it could be said that we'd tie, I had a slight edge over Ludwig.

My opponent, A-5, Lilka Aaron.

"Similar to you."

In the two special classes, both me and Lilka ranked fifth.

It would be revealed which of the fifth-ranked of both classes was actually stronger, right there and then.

Of course, I had only excluded Delphine and Erich from the five I'd mentioned above. Since Delphine had a talent related to archery, she was out of question. In the end, only Erich and Ludwig among the combat talents were below me.

I was simply third from below, so calling me "The weakest" wasn't all that wrong.

It didn't matter if I lost or won.

However, I had no reason to lose on purpose.

At those words, Lilka Aaron slowly stepped forward and then rushed towards me in a single jump like a whirlwind.

-Babang!

"Kurk!"

With tremendous speed and powerful rotation, she kicked out, hitting my upper arm.

It was surprising that she was able to launch such a sharp roundhouse kick at an angle steep enough to hit my head while she was so small.

What was more surprising was the destructive power contained in that kick.

I instinctively felt it the moment I was hit.

That girl…

She wasn't specialized in swordsmanship but close-quarters combat.

The arm that blocked her kick was still tingling.

It made me wonder how so much power could come from such a small body, but I had already seen Ellen, who defied all laws of physics in that regard.

It was probably because of a similar reason.

She dished out a roundhouse kick and quickly stepped away and widened the distance between us. Those movements seemed even more amazing, maybe because of her small frame.

It seemed like she'd estimated my strength after hitting me once.

Strengthening myself physically didn't just mean that I would increase my physical abilities. I had become able to "harden" my body to a certain extent as well.

It should have felt like kicking a rock. However, she was still carefully examining my movements to see if I really could deal with her kick.

It definitely felt like she was more specialized in personal combat, not swordsmanship. It was because of her footwork, movements, and the roundhouse kick that flew at me which I was completely unable to avoid.

However, Erich had met her in a swordsmanship class and gotten completely beaten with the sword.

Once again…

Lilka Aaron lightly stepped up to me.

She was small, but so very nimble.

-Paaang!

However, her attacks were incredibly heavy.

I reached out with my hand while allowing a low kick to fly at my thigh, but she simply turned her shoulder to avoid me and moved away from me.

Close-quarters combat wasn't my speciality.

It was too late to ask for a training sword. First of all, that wasn't a match or something.

We would just aim at each other's neck with training swords and that would be the end of it. It wasn't that kind of fight.

In the end, one of us had to either surrender or be unable to fight anymore to lose that dogfight. If I had a training sword in my hand, I would've had to knock her out with it or something like that.

And at my level, if I didn't do it right, I might end up killing her.

I wasn't really that skilled in close-quarters combat, but I had my supernatural ability.

She was very good at it, however.

Lilka Aaron approached me very carefully and seemed to have adopted a hit-and-run strategy, hitting me and then kept her distance again. There was a very real weight difference between us, so if she actually allowed a hit in even once, she might fall.

She didn't look down on me just because she knew that I was a supernatural power user.

Her main attack style was kicking.

The reason for that didn't seem to be because she was skilled at it, but because it helped to secure the distance between us.

If that little girl came in to punch me, she would enter my reach.

So she inevitably had no choice but to adopt a hit-and-run strategy focused on kicking.

“Hap!”

-Bang!

She rushed at me and hit my thigh with a front-kick, so I took a few steps back.

She didn’t stop there, when she saw that I was pushed back, she gradually followed after me, linking low-kicks and high-kicks. I backed away calmly and slowly.

I shouldn't assume that she could only kick and nothing else. That wasn’t a fight protected by rules. If she was pretending that kicking was her only means of attack and got ahold of my arm, she might suddenly grapple me. It would be over then, no matter what.

If she was skilled in close-quarters combat, she wouldn’t have only learned how to kick.

She definitely would’ve had no other choice but to learn how to effectively subdue an opponent with a huge weight difference due to her size.

It was only natural that she was proficient in grappling, including submissions.

She just calmly but quickly pushed me back. While she did her high kicks, low kicks, and frontal kicks that seemed to push me away, I slowly stepped back before I finally got hit in my stomach. It was so heavy that it almost threw me to the floor.

-Bam!

“Kurk!"

The weight behind it was incredibly heavy because she’d kicked out as she rushed at me. My posture was a little shaken. That was when her eyes lit up.

A small gap…

When I couldn’t react in time and backed off, she quickly lunged at me, launching her body up with her left leg. It was absolutely ridiculous.

It was like…

It felt like I was getting hit by a combo in a fighting game, right?

Anyway, the body of the girl who had pushed me into a corner was rotating in mid-air.

A kick with a strong revolving force behind it…

“Hap!”

-*Paaaaang!*

“Kuurg.”

Hit the back of my right arm.

CHAPTER 210

For a brief moment, my vision went black. The shock that felt so distant made me lose consciousness.

If I had lowered my guard for even an instant, that powerful kick would have hit the side of my head directly, which would have led to me waking to an unknown ceiling once again. The girl quickly retreated in case of an unexpected attack.

Although the atmosphere was rather chilly, Lilka Aaron kept on attacking, which was why the Orbis Class guys seemed rather nervous at first, but with time became a little excited.

However, Lilka Aaron didn't look that good.

—She was clenching her teeth.

That was when I remember something Ellen once said:

'My fist hurts.'

'…You're lying.'

'…It really hurts.'

Ellen and I mostly trained in swordsmanship, but we also frequently practiced close quarter combat.

The reason was simple—she taught me because, looking at what I was up to, she thought that I would have to fight more with my fists rather than a sword.

How should I put it? I was grateful for her consideration, but it did feel rather awkward. However, I didn't have any reason to refuse.

She pretended not to, but she actually cared a whole lot about me.

Ellen had told me that her arms and legs hurt a lot when she fought with me while I

strengthened my body. So after thoroughly beating me up, it was her who asked for a rest.

Although I, as the one who got beaten up, was rather upset that she, as the one who did the beating, whined about her hurting even more, Ellen's words were true.

When even Ellen Artorius said that, then that would mean that I would be able to defeat my opponent just by letting them hit me—unless a decently strong attack managed to hit my vital points.

That was why I just defended as much as possible.

'If you deal with someone specializing in close combat, don't attack them if you can.'

'Why?'

'I'll show you. Try.'

Ellen took up a stance in front of me.

She meant that she was just as good as someone specialized in close combat, so if I tried it on her, I would know—that didn't really surprise me.

As I looked for the gaps in Ellen's stance, I clenched my fists and launched a jab and a straight at her.

And just like that, Ellen grabbed my arm and put me in a flying armbar.

'Hey! Hey! Damnit! I got it! I saw it! You're gonna kill me!"

'You got it?'

'Yeah! I got it! I got it! I really got it!"

Even though I went through such a hard time because she was trying to teach me like that, that was the advice she gave me in the end. At one time, when I caught her foot when she launched a frontal kick towards me, She rotated her whole body, putting me into an arm bar again. She showed me many weird and special movements.

In any case, she showed me in various ways that if I punched out and they could grab

hold of my arms, I would be in danger.

…What the hell was that?

It was rather shameful that I became a bit embarrassed by all the physical contact.

However, it hurt a lot more.

'Grappling can be used in many more situations than you can imagine. There are still a lot of things you don't know yet. You can't possibly cope with everything that it encompasses.'

'…Right. What should I do, then?'

'Don't lower your guard. Don't get caught. Don't catch them."

If I got caught, they'd grapple me.

If I caught them, they'd grapple me.

Anyway, if I made even the tiniest mistake while attacking, I might get hit by a lethal move which would be the end of it. I couldn't become a master of close combat when even my swordsmanship was still severely lacking, so Ellen taught me how to deal with someone specialized in close combat.

So the main point was that I shouldn't mess around if faced with someone like that. If I recklessly trusted in my own strength and attacked, they would destroy me with their technique.

That part wasn't really about close combat itself. I bet she told me that because she thought that I would get into more fist fights than sword fights.

I couldn't believe that I was using those things in that situation.

'You know that guarding is important, right?'

'Yeah.'

'Do you know which part you need to guard the most?'

- ‘Shouldn’t it be my head and face?'

‘The chin.'

Ellen pointed at her own chin.

‘It’s over if you get hit on the chin. That’s why I’m telling you to not let your guard down.’

When one gets hit on the chin, the shock reaches the brain, making them faint. So it had been said that the most important places to protect were the head, the face, and the chin.

I shouldn’t get caught.

I shouldn’t grab them.

I shouldn’t get hit in the chin.

—So I shouldn’t drop my guard.

‘Then you want me to just get hit?’

‘…Don’t get into fights in the first place.'

‘No! You know how things will turn out!’

It wasn’t just once or twice where Ellen thought that I was pathetic, so everything was fine. Ellen could teach me more about close combat, but that wasn’t her main goal. She only gave me some basic training in case I got into a fight with someone specializing in it.

'If you just strengthen your body and don’t get hurt seriously, your opponent will just tire themselves out as long as they don’t manage to grab you.'

‘Well, I mean, winning is good and all, but isn’t winning by getting beaten up even sadder than losing?’

I didn’t want to win like that! I’d rather lose!

Aah, I'm too tired. It's my loss.

It was just sad! It was just like my winning mentality!

'…'

'Is there really nothing?'

Ellen sighed briefly at my whining, then looked at me.

'You are much harder to deal with than others, especially in close combat, because of your supernatural ability.'

'…I guess?'

Because of my ability to strengthen and harden my body, I could even make Ellen say that she was in pain in close combat with me.

'So, just hit them as you get hit.'

'…Huh?'

'Deliberately allow them to attack excessively, and then hit back harder.'

Ellen furrowed her brows as she said so.

'Think about it. In every fight involving close combat, they have to close in to attack, As long as they don't use any tools, every time they get in your reach would create another gap. Every time they attack just creates one big gap in their guard.'

'Just trick them.'

'Let them think they are keeping you in check and hold on. Don't be reckless. Just pretend that you don't care and let them hit you. Don't even try to clumsily respond to their attacks, and just act like an idiot. That way, your opponent will get careless because they'll think that you're clumsy.'

'Then they'll make bigger and bigger moves to knock you out. If you just let yourself get hit, they'll get impatient and try to end it, mostly by using some big technique or move. What I'm trying to tell you is to make your opponent drop their guard.'

'While you're just getting hit, your opponent will exhaust themselves. If you don't drop, the one on the offensive will get more and more tired, and they will want to finish it as fast as possible then. That's when the big techniques will appear.'

'Big movements, of course, will create huge gaps.'

'That's when you attack.'

'Don't try to block them.'

'Don't block them, and just hit them at the same time.'

'That's what's important. Deceive your opponent, pretend that you're clumsy. Pretend that you only know how to get hit. That way you'll either make them feel impatient or make them think that you're a weakling.'

'Then you'll hit them with a counter.'

'You just have to knock them out with that single blow.'

I was better than anyone else in taking a beating. Her advice was to wait for them to make a big move and then hit them harder. If I allowed enough hits without collapsing and KO'd my opponent, I'd win no matter what.

I just had to trust in my stamina, which was unusually greater than others.

Every attack would create a gap. It was essentially a loss to offset those gaps by uselessly going on the defense.

A counter that would pierce through that gap called an attack…

Counter.

While the opponent attacked, I couldn't prepare to defend. It wasn't an exchange of attack and defense, it was an exchange of attacks. Since I had my supernatural power to physically reinforce me, I had to trust in it and just throw one powerful hit and knock them out.

Ellen told me that I wouldn't be able to beat someone specialized in close combat with technique, so I should just believe in my supernatural ability and let them just

cut my flesh to cut through them.

Victory belonged to the last person standing anyway. No matter if one had the upper hand before or not, the one who fell in the end would lose.

I had the advantage in a war of attrition. Even though the damage slowly accumulated, it wasn't unbearable.

Lilka Aaron was keeping her distance, looking for another opportunity to go in.

As Ellen said, if I tried to grab her prematurely or try to land an attack directly, It might've be fatal. And although I had been slightly trained in close quarter combat, I hadn't delved too deep into it yet.

I knew a bit about the sword, but I certainly didn't know all the takedowns martial artists could perform.

Her main attack was kicking. I presumed it was because that was the only method for someone of her small stature to ensure a wide reach.

"Hub!"

-*Pak! Pow! Pak*!

Her leg strength was amazing, but that was all. She wasn't as good as Ellen.

* * *

Actually, maybe my stamina wasn't the way it was because of my supernatural power, but because I had been getting beaten up so much every day that it couldn't be helped but get raised, right? In fact, that seemed to have played a big part in it.

It hurt, but it wasn't unbearable.

I was still fine, but my opponent was getting tired.

"…"

My body was a little harder than that of a normal person, so while she wasn't getting hit at all, she still seemed to be in pain.

Even if I wasn't as hard as a rock, it was only natural that she looked the way she did because she continued to kick that hard body of mine.

Winning by just getting hit wasn't a pleasant way to win, but it actually looked to be happening.

There were various emotions showing up on Lilka Aaron's face.

Why isn't he going down?

He should have gone down just now.

His guard is very firm and he doesn't look tired at all, nor does he look like he took damage.

I have to quickly finish him somehow…

Or I might be the one to fall first.

That was the kind of anxiousness and impatience she was showing.

As Ellen had said, Lilka Aaron seemed to have fallen into the mindset that she might go down first at that rate.

She was going to do something.

She approached me quickly and kicked me in the abdomen.

-*Pow*!

As soon as I was pushed back and my posture was in disarray, she leaped up into the air again.

An aerial back kick—the rotational force behind it was much stronger than before.

Therefore, the gap she left was much bigger as well.

The kick was directed towards my left side.

I didn't back off, but rather rushed into it, keeping my left guard up.

My left arm would take care of guarding.

While I pulled back my right hand…

I would hit her as I was getting hit.

-*Baang*!

I felt a heavy shock running through my left arm.

-*Baam*!

"Kuu… Huk "

And the strong sensation of having hit something ran through my right.

-*Thud*!

Lilka Aaron flew backwards and rolled along the floor as soon as she landed her aerial back kick.

I felt a bit dizzy because I had been hit by such a kick without guarding properly, but I didn't fall down.

"Huu."

"Kuhuk! Arg! Urg! Hub!"

Lilka Aaron, on the other hand, was lying on the floor of the training hall, belly up.

She wasn't even able to breathe properly.

It was only natural, as she was hit by my counter when she least expected it.

Everyone was just staring at me after I knocked my opponent down in a single attack.

The fight was over. In the end, even though she succeeded in landing numerous attacks, she was downed in a single blow.

“Cough… Ugh… H-huu…”

However, Lilka Aaron shuddered and forced herself to stand up.

“…”

I could see horror permeating her eyes.

I was looking into the eyes of someone who had been utterly defeated but had still forced herself to stand up because she couldn’t afford to lose.

The fight had already concluded.

I could see her legs trembling: Just standing was hard enough for her. That was only natural after unexpectedly getting punched into the stomach like that.

I even strengthened my body with my supernatural power.

It was already miraculous that she managed to stand up. However, even though her legs were already shaky, she got into position and confronted me with her teeth clenched.

It had to have felt like I was a fortress that wouldn’t collapse no matter how much she attacked me.

She had attacked a plethora of times and was hit just once. However, it seemed like she couldn’t believe that she was driven to that point by just that one attack.

She had lost her will to fight, but she couldn’t give up.

It wasn’t her who had to kneel down, but her senior who would have to take responsibility. She was far too afraid of the price she would have to pay for the humiliation he would have to experience.

Lilka Aaron simply couldn’t fall.

“Hap!”

However, even though her concentration and body had already reached their limit, Lilka Aaron rushed at me once again. Her movements weren't swift and nimble to the point where I couldn't grasp them like before.

However, she was still fast.

Avoiding her kicks, I punched out, aiming at her face that time.

However, as if she had predicted that, she dodged my fist by slightly twisting her head.

That wasn't all…

She grabbed my wrist and at the same time she propped her body up and placed her legs against my neck.

—Flying Armbar.

However, I had already foreseen that she would come at me like that.

I'd given her that arm on purpose. If I fell down like that and got completely caught, it would be over.

—Physical Strengthening.

It strengthened my muscles to the extreme.

She tried to grapple me while her body had already reached its limit. Even though I was in a more disadvantageous position, I was able to force myself out of it.

"Haap!"

-*Bang*!

I forcefully flung that girl hanging onto my arm against the training hall's floor.

"Kuhuk!"

Lilka Aaron, who hit the floor with her back, got the wind knocked out of her lungs. Although one could overcome the gap in physique with skill, one couldn't overcome

that rather big weight difference when one's body had already been pushed over its limits.

So even if she tried to lock my joints, I could get myself out of her holds through my own strength.

"Arg… Huk…"

I watched her quietly as she forced herself to stand up after I had thrown her on the floor.

There was no sense in fighting anymore.

It had already ended after I'd landed that counter into her stomach. However, the moment I could forcibly release myself from her armbar, it was definitely more than over.

She was in no state to continue when she couldn't keep me in a suppression hold like that, much less win that fight.

Everyone knew that it was Lilka Aaron's defeat. Everyone knew that Lilka Aaron couldn't win against me.

It was my victory by a large margin.

Even that unnamed fourth-year senior who watched over the fight had to have known.

However, Lilka Aaron still stood up, her legs staggering.

"…"

If neither of us surrendered or was completely unable to fight, neither of us would lose.

There wasn't anyone who would do something like declare someone's defeat. We didn't have a judge. It wasn't a duel, it was just a fight.

She would never utter a single word of surrender. Her eyes were telling me that she'd rather die than declare her surrender with her own mouth.

She looked like she was going to experience something horrible otherwise.

The senior had asked to see our guts.

Lilka Aaron had to prove herself, even in that situation where defeat was inevitable.

She had to prove that she'd done her best.

She had to show that she had done everything she could in every way to protect her senior's honor.

She had to fight until she became completely incapacitated to reduce the price she had to pay for her weakness, if even only by a little bit.

That was why that girl, who couldn't even stand properly anymore, just clenched her teeth and got up again and again.

The Orbis Class…

One of the special Classes inside of Temple along with the Royal Class.

A place in which one had to prove oneself through one's effort, not talent. That was why I'd set it up as a place in which military-like discipline, strict training, and a clear hierarchy between seniors and juniors existed.

I always felt surprised or uncomfortable when I found those unexpected ways in which my settings specifically worked.

In that case, I felt really uncomfortable.

This world was created based on a few words I'd strung together.

There were people who had to suffer from all the absurdities I had placed into this world.

Every time I saw someone like that, I would feel a certain sense of responsibility, guilt, and discomfort.

Lilka Aaron had already been defeated, but she still stood up, even while shaking, just to prove that she had done her best.

-*Pow*!

“Kurk!”

When I lightly kicked her thigh, the girl’s posture completely crumbled, making her land on her butt.

My only thoughts were that I couldn’t bring myself to attack an already collapsed opponent with all my might.

She stood up again, trembling like a newborn calf. The girl came towards me again to attack me as much as possible just to be beaten again. Her attacks didn’t hurt anymore even when I didn’t strengthen it.

It was mere desperation.

Giving up wouldn’t work.

On the contrary, it wouldn’t mean anything if I surrendered. Everyone could see that Lilka Aaron wouldn’t have won.

Everyone present watched that long concluded fight in total silence. All the Orbis Class’ first-years wore miserable expressions.

Some of them wanted to step in, but because that senior was there, that wasn’t possible. The senior was just quietly watching over the fight with his arms crossed.

I felt like I was being bullied. I had to beat up that girl who had already lost her will to fight, incapable of keeping going, who just kept on standing up again and again, her eyes completely dead.

“…”

She was looking at me.

It seemed like she wanted to say something with her eyes.

I couldn’t make out any details, but I could read her one desire from them.

Please, make me faint.

Don't let me get up.

—That was what her eyes seemed to plead.

Yeah, even though it couldn't be called a fight anymore, my opponent was forced to keep going.

Surrendering wasn't the best I could do for that opponent of mine, who was made to keep fighting, all I could do was end the fight.

"Okay."

"…"

"Come on, sleep."

I got close to Lilka Aaron and dug my fist into her stomach once again.

-*Thud*!

"Ku… Huk!"

Lilka Aaron, after receiving a strong hit to her abdomen once again, was left lying on the training hall's floor, her head looking up.

She didn't get up.

"It's over."

The senior who had been watching from the sidelines briefly declared the fight's end.

"Hey, take her to the priest on duty."

At those words, some of the first-year students rushed forward and carried away the collapsed Lilka Aaron. I'd hit her quite hard. If I hadn't, she might not have fainted.

Maybe I ended up rupturing her gut or something. That was something for the priest on duty to take care of.

She wasn't going to die.

[Challenge completed - Fight with the Orbis Class]

[500 achievement points acquired.]

I could also confirm that the main purpose of the fight had been accomplished.

“You won, Reinhardt.”

The unknown fourth-year senior approached me and placed his arm on my shoulder.

“What’s the matter? You should be happy about your victory. My, for her to lose so overwhelmingly, even if she was just ranked fifth… I didn’t expect that to happen. That would mean that everyone below fifth place would also lose to you…”

The senior grinned, scanning the faces of the other Orbis Class students who remained in the training hall.

“Was I a bit too lax as your senior…?"

I knew what those words meant. Everyone’s expressions, which had completely hardened before, were colored in fear. It was Lilka Aaron who lost, but in the end, that meant that I had defeated those below her as well.

All of them had to pay the price of defeat.

"Anyway, a promise is a promise, I shall apologize as a representative of…”

“I don’t need your apology.”

I looked him straight in the face and shook off the hand he placed over my shoulder.

I couldn’t help but realize it after seeing it with my own eyes…

That place was bound to create many more monsters like Ender Wilton, over and over again. His case was just slightly more radical and somewhat unusual.

It was impossible not to get completely broken in that kind of environment.

No one could be free in that system that promoted and enforced loathing, jealousy, hatred and feelings of inferiority.

There was no way that anyone could remain sane under that constant pressure to improve.

"Just fight me, you fucking bastard."

"…What?"

In the end…

No matter how one put it, I was taking it really bitterly.

CHAPTER 211

I felt like not only the three idiot brothers but also the Orbis Class students were really shocked by my sudden declaration.

What's wrong with him?

That was what their expressions seemed to say.

The same went for the fourth-year senior.

"Ha-haha… What did I just hear? Fight? With me? Why?"

"Cause I feel like it."

"…What?"

"Looking at you, you really are the most fucked up bastard around here, aren't you?"

I glared at him as I clenched my fists.

He would have been a victim of that system in the past as well, and after enduring it, he became the perpetrator himself. He could still be a victim.

"Every time I see fucking bastards like you, I feel hella sick."

He was an Orbis Class fourth-year student.

I was going to lose.

"So I don't care whether I win or lose. I'm doing this because I want you to know what a fucking bastard you are. Got that?"

It wasn't just everyone else's expressions that turned rather weird as they heard my aggressive words, but the fourth-year's smiles gradually stiffened as well.

"Fucking shame on you, you bastard. Seriously, how could you fucking tell a 17-year-

old kid from a different year to just go and die? Do you find shit like this fun? Picking on younger juniors again and again? Are you fucking touched in the head? Huh?"

"The Orbis Class' problems are to be solved by the Orbis Class. I don't think this is any of your business."

"If you're messing up a bunch of kids, that ain't a fucking class problem, it's a social problem. You goddamn social evil!"

"…What?"

I looked at the fourth-year senior whose expression seemed to get more and more twisted.

"It's fucking weird that the Orbis Class is operated like this, but what can I do 'bout that? However, though this place is weird, this place got even weirder because of a bunch of circle jerks like you."

He hadn't even threatened her directly, he'd just done it through vague and indirect actions. He didn't even have to tell her that he'd kill her if she lost.

He wouldn't dirty his own hands with Lilka Aaron—he would just delegate that task to his juniors.

He wouldn't directly threaten or hit anyone.

He was a guy who didn't want to take on the title of the 'bad guy' and just solved everything with his words. He was the type of guy who'd want to deny everything by saying things like "What? I didn't do anything though?"

Even in that fight, he didn't say anything like "If you surrender, be prepared to go through hell."

He'd just said that he would kneel down if she lost.

With just those few words, he managed to make the others' imaginations run wild.

He was a coward before he was a bad guy.

That guy was a damn bastard in his own right in that problematic system.

The faces of the Orbis Class guys were twisting more and more at my direct verbal attacks.

What's wrong with him? Did he go crazy?

The three brothers seemed a bit different, though.

Ah, he's causing trouble again.

—That was what they seemed to think.

It also seemed like they were secretly anticipating that.

Get a taste of Reinhardt's ferociousness, you punks.

"What good would it do me if I fought with a first-year? Why would I?"

That guy didn't want to fight either. It was only natural that he would end up winning, but there was nothing good about that. Losing was unimaginable for him, but he couldn't just win either.

However, it seemed like that guy was actually constantly pressuring his juniors after all, not just that day.

It was more than certain that he wasn't known to be a good senior, however, in the end, he was still just the type who would never try to do anything rough himself.

So he didn't see a reason to fight a losing battle, even if he was on the winning side.

The real cause of Ender Wilton's fall was the abuse he'd received from his seniors.

It was inevitable that a case like Ender Wilton's would occur in that vicious cycle in which the victims ended up becoming the perpetrators.

I didn't know whether I could break it…

But I could convey something with my words.

If they didn't like it, they could stick it to their seniors.

They weren't going to get killed.

"Are you scared, you bastard? If you're so scared, just fuck off. Don't spout any more bullshit. Why the fuck are you meddling with the first-years' problems when you're already that old? Aren't you fucking embarrassed? Don't you have anything better to do? Oh, or could it be that you're such a fucked up bastard that you can't do anything but terrorize your juniors?"

You're already that old and you still have nothing better to do but meddle with the problems of the lower-year kids.

It seemed like my words had finally made him reach his limits.

"…Hah."

He glared at me as he swept his hair back.

That was the first time I had met a narrow-eyed character.

"Cheeky bastard."

However, the guy just widened his eyes without much buildup.

"Okay. Let's do it then."

A fight with nothing to lose.

It seemed like that senior had finally decided to truly educate his cheeky junior.

"Oh, you still don't know my name, right? Alright, I'll tell you."

The guy smiled.

"I'm Orbis Class' Year 4 A-1, Oscar de Gardias."

No.

No, wait just a sec.

This dude is imperial royalty?

It was then that I properly looked at his face.

—Blonde hair and golden eyes.

Certainly, those were the characteristics of the Gardias family.

Were the eyes of the Gardias family special or something?

When I thought about it, Bertus and Charlotte also kind of felt like narrow-eyed characters.

Oscar de Gardias. That bastard pretended to be kind and then showed his true colors, giving off a pretty bloody atmosphere.

I was wondering whether there was something special about that jerk.

However, out of all things, the guy I cursed out for being a fucking bastard turned out to be part of the imperial family.

No, I mean, not all blondes on the continent belonged to the Gardias Family!

I should carefully look at other people's eyes from now on.

But well, no use crying over spilled milk.

It would be pretty difficult to take all that back—I didn't even want to do that.

It was a wall I had to crush anyway.

"I'll be rather disappointed if you changed your mind now that you found out who I am."

"That won't happen, so let's do this."

I didn't know how hard that guy hit or what his position in the imperial family was.

I couldn't just say "I didn't know you were from the imperial family. I'm sorry. I'll take it back."

I couldn't just take back the words that I had already said. No matter if he was

imperial royalty or whatever, I had to go through with it. Things didn't work out like I planned, but I just had to continue moving forward.

"Yeah, there are two members of the imperial family in the first year of the Royal Class as well, after all. You wouldn't get scared by just that, right?"

Oscar de Gardias pulled out one of the provided training swords.

He was someone who had been trained in the handling of weapons.

I also took a sword.

Not only was he a member of the imperial family, he was also A-1 of the fourth year. He shouldn't be the type of person who would seek to raise his self-esteem through his juniors because he wasn't skilled enough or something. On the contrary, he was very talented.

Regardless of whether he was of the imperial family or not, I had no chance of winning.

"The rules are the same as before. Whoever surrenders first or is incapacitated will lose."

"Good."

The guy looked at me and smiled.

After he introduced himself as part of the imperial family and number A-1, the three arrogant brothers seemed to think that I had already stepped on a landmine, and the Orbis Class first-years seemed to think that my future was already very obvious because I had touched someone I shouldn't have.

The rules were the same as before.

—Whoever declared their defeat or was incapacitated would lose.

But it seemed like I wouldn't even have the time to declare my defeat—it looked like he wanted to end things in an instant.

-Kakaang!

* * *

After rushing up to me, he instantly hit my training sword. I felt my palms tingling with intense pain. However, I didn't let go of my sword.

I used the Body Strengthening and Swordsmanship preset. Oscar stabbed at me, and I pushed my sword against his.

-Scraaape! Scrape!

While pushing against each other's swords, we were both trying to press our swords against the others' neck. If the balance of our power was disturbed by even a little or either of us slipped, our attacks would immediately get let through.

He grabbed his sword with his empty left hand and tried to get the upper hand.

Half-swording…

I also tried to avoid getting pushed back in our power struggle by holding the tip of my sword in line with his movements.

-Scrrrrrape!

"You're faithful… to the basics, huh?"

He looked at me with a sly smile on his lips. He'd tried to push me away in an instant, but was honestly surprised when I actually responded to his attempt.

"You seemed to have learned from a pretty competent teacher, isn't that right?"

Was he showing off that he could talk casually even in that situation?

"Yeah… She's incomparable to a bastard like you."

As far as I had learned from Ellen, I had a talent in swordsmanship that exceeded rank itself. I intuitively knew how to respond to any situation, when I should hit and when I should retreat, from that girl who was born with a natural talent for combat each and every day.

-Hit!

“Kurg!”

However, while our swords were scraping against each other, he kicked my ankle. When I was losing my balance from that, he stabbed at me.

-Bam!

“Ugh!"

He jabbed my stomach with the blunt training sword, after which I quickly retreated to catch my breath.

“Did you know that, if this was a real battle, you would have died?”

He stared at me, his expression completely relaxed.

“But this is just a fight, so I haven’t won yet.”

I’d let one attack through.

Had it been a real battle, I would have been killed by Oscar de Gardias. However, it was just a brawl. It wasn’t over yet—I would get beaten up until I surrendered.

There was no shame in doing that.

“I don’t feel like I will hear the words ‘I surrender’ leaving your mouth, though.”

“…”

“Well, I’ll just have to beat you until they do.”

-Kang! Kakang! Kang!

After he succeeded in landing his first attack, he came at me more fiercely. As if he was done testing the waters, he went on the offensive.

—Side, bottom. Top. Stabbing through the middle.

He didn’t just attack me with his sword. If he saw a gap while I was blocking one of his attacks, he would punch me with his left fist or kick me or the training sword

itself.

-Hit! Bam! Bang!

“Hurk!"

“You’re full of gaps, junior.”

He couldn’t even be compared to Lilka Aaron, whom I’d fought earlier. That guy was better than me both physically and in swordsmanship.

I wasn’t a match for him, and if it was a practice match, I would have lost more than five times already. However, since it was a fight, he would punch, stab, and swing at me until I was knocked out.

It was also largely due to the accumulated damage from the fight I had with Lilka Aaron.

-Baam!

“Kurg!”

A frontal kick hit my abdomen, making me take a few steps back. He rushed at me, hitting my training sword as if he had no intentions of letting me go.

I can’t.

I have to use ‘that’.

-Kaang!

“!”

As I hit his sword from the bottom up, I lifted up his arms, leaving his chest wide open

“Haap!”

-Boom!

“Uuurg!"

As soon as I hit his side with my right foot, he fell to the floor and rolled over.

“Haah… Haah…”

“…What is this?”

He hurriedly got up, fixed his posture, and titled his head.

“You… what did you do?”

He looked a little flustered, as if something had occurred that shouldn't have happened.

Yeah, it must have felt weird.

“Did you know? I’m a supernatural power user.”

Supernatural power…

Lilka Aaron seemed to know, but Oscar de Gardias looked like he didn’t know that I was a supernatural power user.

However, I hadn’t used ‘that’ in my previous fight.

“Supernatural powers…”

Oscar put more strength into his gaze when he heard me say the words “supernatural power”.

Something strange had happened just then.

It was because I’d managed to suddenly break his guard with a different kind of explosive power than I had shown before.

He must have sensed how much strength I had before, so it must have seemed strange to him, feeling such formidable power suddenly filling me.

I had been using self-suggestion as a physical strengthening ability.

However, not too before that, I'd realized a more advanced use of the supernatural power of self-suggestion.

—That was 'Skills'.

I started another chuunibyou session, created an image of a skill in my mind, named it, and became able to use it.

As always, that power was rather destructive for my mentality, but its effects were powerful.

The one I'd used just then was called 'One Strike'.

—I used my supernatural power solely on powering up a single attack.

"Here I come."

That time, it was 'Rapid Movement'.

"!"

Before he could react, I reached him and stabbed my sword at him.

-Kadadang!

"Kuhuk!"

As that guy blocked my sword stab, I went a little further and gave him a headbutt.

-*Bam*!

"Kuhurg!"

-Thud!

I smiled at him as he grabbed his ringing head and took a few steps back.

"What? Is it that unusual?"

I'd been deathly embarrassed when I'd set up those skills, but they were the most effective thing I had!

CHAPTER 212

My discovery of self-suggestion's other use was purely coincidental.

There was a time when I was sparring with Ellen as usual when I'd gotten really annoyed by getting beaten up like that. Of course, that probably wasn't the first or second time, though.

Anyway, I only wanted to break through Ellen's iron-wall-like guard at least once, just once.

Only one time…

I just wanted to make her drop her sword once. I just wanted to create a single gap and get one hit in.

And then, when I swung my sword…

'…'

'…'

Nothing really happened.

As was to be expected, I'd failed to make her drop her weapon and was hit by Ellen's counter right away, her sword stopped against my neck.

'That attack just now was a little weird.'

'…What?'

Although my attack had failed, Ellen stood there tilting her head.

'It was different from usual.'

Ellen had been sparring with me for quite a long time, so she knew every detail about how my attacks would feel when I did and didn't use my supernatural power.

However, my attack just then was a little more powerful than usual.

—To the point where one could call it strange.

While I couldn't break through her defense, the blow was still a lot stronger than usual.

'Do it again.'

I didn't really know how I'd done it, but Ellen told me to try it again, so after some trial and error, I realized a new way to make use of self-suggestion.

By focusing my ability on one specific thing, I could strengthen certain aspects a lot more compared to when I strengthened my whole body for a short period of time. A certain attack, reinforcement of a body part, or heightening my agility.

Just like the time I'd set up various reinforcement-type presets before and pulled them up whenever I needed them, I did something similar that time around as well.

If I familiarized myself with a certain usage method, named it, and committed it to memory, I would be able to activate the corresponding reinforcement just by recalling its name.

…I had to focus on the name of a skill I'd come up with and recall the delusion that was connected to it, so it felt rather shameful.

I was glad that I didn't have to say it out loud.

Just thinking about it in my head was enough to cause me mental damage.

And after, it'll be that Asura-something! I absolutely believe it'll happen!

I definitely had potential, though…

…So, those days, I was trying to get familiar with using the skills that resulted from my delusions as I was fighting Ellen.

Of course, only Ellen knew what I was thinking about in my head.

'…No matter how I look at it, it's a strange supernatural power.'

'…I think so, too.'

Ellen seemed to think that my ability, which was rather vague and up to interpretation, was a rather strange ability, regardless of its effects.

It was great that everything worked pretty well, but its output itself was still weak, so it was more of a strange ability rather than an overpowered one.

Anyway…

That was my first time trying to use those skills I'd set up using self-suggestion on someone else other than Ellen.

Oscar was observing me from a distance. He'd successfully landed several attacks on me, but hadn't caused enough damage to knock me out.

"…How annoying."

My skills inevitably gave me a significant advantage. If I suddenly used my supernatural ability, my opponent wouldn't be able to predict my movements, speed, and strength.

Ellen also had a hard time dealing with that in the beginning when I started using the ability. It was so anomalous that it was hard to respond to.

Of course, after some time, she started to beat me easily again.

The reason for that was that Ellen had become accustomed to me using my skills as well, so she just read when I would use them. I couldn't win against her because she was able to predict what people might do.

However, that Oscar de Gardias in front of me wasn't Ellen.

He was definitely superior to me, but he didn't know what supernatural power I was using. He could only roughly guess that it was a power of the physical strengthening kind.

My opponent didn't know what my exact abilities were.

That was a clear advantage.

The number of skills available to me were three:

—One Strike, which strengthened the destructive power of an attack.

—Rapid Movement, which increased my reflexes and both my movement and evasion speed.

—Hardening, which maximized my body's defense in case I wasn't able to block an attack.

I had a lot of other skills in mind, but I hadn't gotten used to them yet. Only those three were practical enough at the moment.

-Kang! Kaang! Kang!

"Kurg!"

However, the gap between us was too wide.

Even though I had been working insanely hard, I had only trained for about half a year at most.

And that effort I'd put in was just everyday life for the Orbis Class.

While its system was absurd, it forced its students to put in every bit of effort they could muster up.

They maintained it, no matter what happened, because it worked in the end. That system couldn't just have shortcomings, after all.

Fourth-year Oscar de Gardias was a man who consistently worked hard in the Orbis Class.

My talents were Mana Sensitivity, Mana Control, and Self-Suggestion.

The two magic-related talents were practically useless to me at that point.

I also didn't have any talents related to swordsmanship or any other weapons.

Except for my supernatural power, I didn't have any advantage over him as a

member of the Royal Class. The only difference between me and an Orbis Class student was that single supernatural power, nothing more.

My opponent had trained for more than three years longer than me. No, if he'd actually started his training before he'd joined Temple, then the gap between us was even bigger.

Therefore, I couldn't close that gap in training with just that supernatural power.

A supernatural power user who had just trained for half a year…

And someone who'd gone through three bloody years of intensive training…

I couldn't beat someone like that.

-*Bang!*

"Kurg!"

He stabbed his sword into my abdomen, after which I took a few steps back while holding my stomach.

If I hadn't blocked that blow with Hardening, my stomach might have burst. Even a training sword could cause fatal damage if stabbed into the abdomen, after all.

He had no mercy at all.

"I didn't think a first-year would make a good match for me. You're quite the monster, aren't you?"

Oscar de Gardias smiled wryly at me, who hadn't gone down due to that rather powerful blow but only held my stomach.

Monster…

That meant that, in the end, he acknowledged me.

However, his smile seemed more annoyed than pleased or delighted.

"Isn't it absurd?"

“…What are you talking about all of a sudden?”

"I’ve been practicing my swordsmanship since I was little."

He was still smiling as he pointed his sword at me. However, there were many twisted emotions contained in that smile.

“But isn’t it absurd that you’re able to stand up to me even though you look like you just started practicing the sword? You endured my attacks several times, and while you aren’t on par with me, who is a senior in a much higher year, you are still able to put up a fight anyway.”

“…Only because you have a supernatural power.”

"I mean, how does that make any sense?”

There was hatred mixed in that smile.

I didn’t know where that hatred originated from, but his smile showed twisted anger and hatred.

* * *

I should have been overpowered by that guy with just one blow due to our gap in experience. However, I didn’t fall, even when I was beaten, and that guy even used several attacks aiming at my vitals.

Wasn't that absurd?

While I couldn’t ignore the gap in experience between us, I was able to put up a fight like that just because I had a supernatural power.

Oscar de Gardias was rather furious.

I couldn’t really say anything.

I wasn’t actually that talented, but I’d actually got these powers through a cheat that was even far beyond a mere talent. I couldn’t say that I didn’t work hard to get where I was, but I also couldn’t say that everything was due to my own effort.

I couldn't say anything to Oscar, who spoke of his resentment and hatred as well as the time and effort he had accumulated becoming meaningless in front of a talent.

I didn't even want to laugh.

No matter what a naturally talented person said to someone untalented, they would only end up angering the other.

"I hate 'effort' more than anything else in the world. There are so many things that one cannot achieve just by that alone."

—Oscar de Gardias.

I had a vague idea of what he meant.

That guy didn't only hold hatred for talents, but for effort as well.

He was full of hatred for all the things he couldn't get just through effort.

He was someone who was from the imperial family but could never become the emperor.

No matter what he accomplished or did through his own strength, he wouldn't be able to get what he truly wanted.

So he just ended up hating everything—Talent, effort, everything.

In the end, it was meaningless to say that he led a blessed life because he was born into the imperial family.

That person who had lived a life deprived of so many things couldn't even see me properly.

Oscar hated effort to such an extent.

He couldn't enter the Royal Class but managed to reach rank one in his fourth year in the Orbis Class.

With the exception of the Royal Class, that guy stood at the top of all fourth-years in Temple.

Someone who devoted everything to effort would turn out to be one of two kinds of people:

Either a person who completely believed in their own effort and nothing else, or someone who utterly detested it.

Oscar de Gardias was the latter.

That was usually the case for those who ended up with nothing after all the fucking effort they put in.

I was speechless.

“Why are you forcing your juniors to do these things when you hate effort so much?”

He said that he hated effort more than anything in the world, and yet he forced his juniors to do those kinds of things. Didn’t he fucking hate that shit, so why?

The faces of the Orbis Class students who heard those words were also slightly distorted.

“If that’s all you can do, then you should do it the best you can, am I wrong?”

No matter how much one hated it, there was nothing one could change about it.

If all one had was effort, one had to put one’s all into it.

“If you aren’t born with talent, you have to work your hardest.”

That sounded like some intense self-deprecation.

He seemed to think that not being born with talent was a sin in itself. It was a sin to be untalented—one had to atone for that sin through effort.

“What would even change if one resented the world? There’s nothing else I can do but work hard, so that’s what I should do.”

It was a twisted, miserable, and self-deprecating mentality…

Just like the Obris Class students were broken by that system, Oscar de Gardias was

also a broken human.

No, that guy probably entered that place already broken.

There was no one better suited to enter the Orbis Class than that guy.

I didn't know whether Oscar de Gardias was right or wrong.

"If that's what you think, then just live that way, you bastard. Don't make these kids live as harshly as you."

One couldn't force others to put a disproportionate amount of effort into something by making them feel like sinners as well.

He was a madman who was trying to drag everyone around him into the same hell, knowing that he could never get what he wanted no matter how much effort he put in.

Oscar was that kind of guy.

"Maybe you're right."

-Clank!

He suddenly threw his sword to the ground.

"By the way, hearing these things from someone like you makes me feel rather confused."

Anger flashed in the guy's eyes.

It seemed like he would get serious, as if he was disgusted hearing me talk about those not born with talents while I myself had one.

The act of throwing away his sword didn't mean he would give up.

-Srrrrrr…

"Let's finish this quickly."

"…"

I was silently watching the changes in his body. His golden eyes began to glow with blue energy, and a blue aura covered his whole body.

—It was Magic Body Strengthening.

He was in his fourth year.

Seeing that he was Orbis Class' Rank One, it could be said that he was the strongest among the 10,000 or so fourth-years excluding the Royal Class.

It wasn't unusual for him to be able to use magic body strengthening. No, maybe it was rather normal.

However, having talents or whatever were already meaningless when one was learning how to do magic body strengthening. In fact, just being able to realize how to use it already meant one was blessed with talent. Realizing how to do it in one's fourth year was by no means too late or something.

That guy didn't get anything from his efforts? As if.

He'd obviously gained something.

Nevertheless, he still abhorred effort.

Magic Body Strengthening was too low a reward compared to what he really wanted.

"You're a genius as well, you bastard."

"Really? I don't think so, though."

"If you're not a genius, then who is?"

"Maybe my standards are simply too high, then."

Everyone was staring blankly at Oscar, who was using Magic Body Strengthening so effortlessly.

He'd thrown away the training sword because he didn't need it anymore. Rather, it

was just too cumbersome to continue to use that training sword while using Magic Body Strengthening in situations other than actual battle.

Oscar showed off his Magic Body Strengthening to finish the fight quickly, as it seemed like he would just end up feeling more and more disgusted the longer he dealt with me.

Even if he didn't strengthen himself with magical power I had no chance of winning.

My defeat was inevitable, so nothing really changed.

How painful would it be if I got hit by his fist after it got strengthened by his magical power?

"Here I come."

-*Bam!*

Oscar's fist, which rushed at me at a speed far beyond what I could perceive, planted itself into my abdomen.

—Hardening.

-*Boom!*

"…!"

Not even a scream was able to leave my mouth at the sudden shock running through my body.

CHAPTER 213

-Bam,bam, bam!

I rolled several times on the training hall's floor before stopping on my back after that single blow. The training sword had already fallen out of my hand.

It was already good enough that I'd only let go of my sword.

"Ugh!"

Just like Lika Aaron had before, I got up while gagging a few times.

Even though I'd reduced the impact of the blow as much as possible with Hardening, I still felt like my stomach had been turned upside down.

It seemed like he wanted to end the fight quickly.

-Bam!

Once again, that guy rushed at me, throwing his fist at my face that time.

—Rapid Movement.

However, I couldn't avoid it completely.

-Baaam!

Fortunately, what he hit was my left arm, which I used to guard, but when it got hit, it felt like it was about to break.

However, it didn't break.

-Hit!

"Kurg!"

A sharp kick to my thighs made me roll on the floor once again. He had no intention of letting me off the hook.

I was kicked, beaten, and knocked away before I could fix my posture.

More pain was added even before I could feel the strangely intense pain of the previous hit.

-Hit!

.

-Baam!

.

.

-Pow!

.

.

-Hit!

Oscar's attack combo while using Magic Body Strengthening was fierce. In less than a minute, I was completely beaten up and pushed to the edge of the training hall.

I felt like I was about to break.

No, maybe I had already broken.

I thought that I had already gotten used to the pain.

I was in so much pain that my whole body was trembling. If I hadn't already gotten used to pushing my body to its limits, I probably wouldn't even be able to keep standing for a while.

The situation was similar to that time I had fought Mayarton.

At that time, most of my classmates really hated me. However, as I was getting beaten over and over until I got pushed to my limits, but kept getting up, they became a little supportive of me.

They'd cheered for me, as they felt sympathetic towards me.

That part was also similar.

The expressions of Orbis Class students, who had stared at me with hostile eyes after I'd easily defeated Lilka Aaron, after seeing their senior attacking and trampling all over me, became more and more bizarre.

Stop. Why are you still going on?

—That was what their expressions seemed to say.

It was the same during the fight with Mayarton.

However, it couldn't be compared to the time I'd fought with Mayarton, though.

My opponent was far superior to me, even in his normal state, and as long as he continued to use Magic Body Strengthening, I didn't even have the slightest chance of winning.

"You punk, you didn't really think that you could win against me, did you?"

"I already knew that I couldn't, you bastard."

"…"

Oscar was looking at me as if he was dumbfounded at the fact that I could still talk back in my situation.

I couldn't win. I never even thought I would be able to win anyway. Oscar didn't seem to understand me.

"Then I can't understand why you're continuing to fight a losing battle."

"I told you…"

I stumbled slightly and stared at him.

“You should be called out for what you are, a fucking asshole, by a junior who is a whole fucking lot weaker than you. You’re such a fucking bastard that a junior from a completely different class has to tell you.”

Even though I knew that it was a fight I could never win, I needed to let that guy know just what a fucking asshole he was, so I’d stepped up.

Because no one else could tell him. Because there wasn’t a single person in the Orbis Class that could tell him something like that.

“If no one ever told you, you’d never know, so I’m doing it for you.”

“…”

“Yeah, I fucking knew I’d lose, but you needed to know this. Whatever reason you use as an excuse, you’re just a sadist who enjoys tormenting his juniors. You’re a fucking cowardly bastard who doesn’t even dirty his own hands as well.”

“I’m a coward?”

“Yeah, your way of talking that constantly creates a way out for you? That’s just a bunch of bullcrap.”

An absurd system…

However, that guy was actually a perpetrator who didn’t want to play the role of the perpetrator, even in that system.

“…It’s rather reassuring to be in the same class as the imperial prince and princess, huh?”

These words finally left his mouth. He thought that I believed that the prince and princess would have my back, which was allowing me to act like that.

“Nah, I always act like this. I don’t need backing or some shit. What? You can’t even tell a fucking jerk that they are a fucking jerk if you don’t have someone behind you? So what if I got beaten up here in the Orbis Class. Aren’t you enjoying your status as the perpetrator right now?”

I looked at him as I smiled and shook my fingertips.

"That's just the kind of bastard you are. Yeah, environment and shit like that isn't important, it's what you're born with. Just like talent determines a person, you were also born with a talent."

"…"

"You were just born to be a fucking bastard. You're a coward, you're mean, you're not willing to get your own hands dirty. Rather than getting rid of problems, you're just a punk who lives with and thrives through them. And then you blame it on your environment. You feel fucking sorry for yourself because you don't have a Talent. And then, after you feel bored from tormenting yourself, you get your second-hand satisfaction from bullying others. You enjoy yourself by making others feel miserable. You're such a fucked up little piece of shit who just wants to see the misery you see in yourself in others as well."

He had a Talent as well.

A talent for being a fucking bastard.

These were very good words to offend and piss him off.

"You just made me angry now. There's nothing good about that, is there?"

He came rushing at me with his eyes wide open. Oscar's movements, even after he started using Magic Body Strengthening, became even faster and more unpredictable than before.

However…

He lost his composure.

After he rushed to me, he used his left leg as an axis to roundhouse kick me.

—*Rapid Movement.*

I turned to my side…

And elbowed his temple.

-Bang!

“Kuhuk!”

Magic Body Strengthening also provided some protection.

I felt a certain sense of rigidity through my elbow, but he apparently fell to his side.

I’d uselessly bothered him and made him move more honestly.

So I’d succeeded in landing a blow, making him fall to the side.

I stood still, watching him slowly rise, holding his temples.

Embarrassment and anger appeared in his eyes.

He seemed to wonder how he could have allowed an attack to land even though he was using Magic Body Strengthening.

“…”

“Hah. I made a mistake…”

Now.

Let’s just surrender.

Let’s just finish this now.

Now that I’d landed one last hit before I surrendered, that guy wouldn’t be able to hit me anymore. It was a fight I couldn’t have won to begin with, so it was fine if I just won mentally.

I’d just smirk at the guy, mockingly say that he did a great job, and go get my injuries treated by the priest on-call.

I…

Because I wouldn’t be able to win…

I'd picked that fight while knowing it was unwinnable, so I should've put an end to it then. It wasn't like my life was at stake anyway. If defeat would mean death, then I would have struggled some more, but that wasn't the case there.

What I was trying to convey there wasn't even that great a message, either.

I just had to tell him what a fucking son of a bitch he was, even though I knew that I wasn't a match for him.

Everyone was scared of the seniors, afraid of the collective of seniors, but none of them dared to say that they hated the way they were treated.

None of them would even say that they were scared of them.

However, there I was, simply continuing to speak even though I was getting beat up in a fight I had no chance of winning.

If something was fucked up, one could just say that it was fucked up. Even if one was weak, one could still say that much.

I was showing them that there was nothing wrong with calling a bastard who tormented younger students without even having the guts to wear the title of perpetrator that he was a fucking bastard, even in that fucked up system. Other than getting beat up a little, nothing would happen.

It was okay to lose.

That was the only message I wanted to convey to them.

-Baam!

"Kuhg!"

However, even while I was being hit by his follow-up hits and rolling on the floor while still trying to avoid his punches that kept flying at me again and again by very narrow margins, I managed to land a knee kick into his face.

I didn't surrender.

I can stop now.

I thought that I had done enough, but I just couldn't.

I can't win.

* * *

As those kinds of thoughts kept appearing in my mind countless times, I realized something.

When I was in the Darklands, I'd fought with my life on the line.

And after returning to Temple, I'd become somewhat aloof towards practice matches at Temple or quarrels and conflicts with others.

Guess that's what's happening. What the hell's wrong with that guy? How annoying.

That was how I let most things slide. When Heinrich tried to pick a fight with me, I hadn't even tried to respond at first, although I had ended up throwing some punches.

I also hadn't responded to the three idiot brothers' attempts to start a fight with me in the beginning of the semester.

Guess that's what's happening. What's the big deal?

I hadn't gotten stronger since I'd gone to the Darklands

I had actually grown weaker.

It wasn't like I had matured, saying things like I should ignore it just because my life wasn't on the line.

This is a fight I can't help but lose, so let's just be satisfied with a mental victory. It's not like I'm going to die or anything.

How was that different from resignation?

I was able to gain a certain amount of strength after all my training, which made me

complacent. I still had a long way to go.

I would get stronger in the future.

I wasn't that desperate at the moment, though.

I'd worked hard and done some immediate training, but whatever the situation was just wasn't too desperate yet.

I was fighting a losing battle against some fucked up jerk. However, even if I lost, I'd managed to call him exactly what he was—a fucked up jerk.

It was fine because Ender Wilton and the other Orbis Class first-year students, whose fear of their seniors' abuse had been engraved in their minds, saw the scene.

I tried to be satisfied with something like that.

I could lose because my life wasn't at stake.

My mind was just all over the place.

I shouldn't be like that.

At that moment, I finally realized that I had become a lot weaker ever since I'd come back from the Darklands.

That wasn't how my power should be. That wasn't how it should be used.

I completely forgot what the basis of my power was. As I continued to use that supernatural ability, I ended up forgetting the essence of it.

Of course, I wouldn't be able to win a fight I already thought I was going to lose.

I had to fight while believing that I could win. Even if I couldn't win, I still had to believe I could.

I had come to a standstill.

I had been stuck ever since I'd come back from the Darklands. It didn't matter whether I obtained Tiamata or not, my mind itself was stagnant.

I shouldn't just solely rely on the results of my training and my slight improvements.

Something like that had happened again.

I had to believe that I would win every fight.

"For a guy who doesn't even know how to stand properly, you have quite the foul mouth."

"…"

"I might be a coward, but you are just pathetic. Your tenacity is commendable, but isn't this enough to call it obstinacy? You have to be able to give up when it's time to give up, and don't you think that time has already come?"

Oscar, who watched me trembling as I stood up, wore a sly smile on his lips.

"Even if you have a supernatural power, I don't think you'll be much of anything when you become a fourth year."

A weakling's obstinacy…

Oscar laughed at me.

The first years, however, were amazed.

I could feel the wish of just getting knocked out slightly take shape inside of me. Lilka Aaron had just wanted to collapse, so I'd knocked her out.

However, I didn't actually want to collapse.

—So I didn't.

I would lose, but I completely forgot to even think about that. I couldn't stay stuck in place. I couldn't just run away on the pretext that it wouldn't cost me my life.

I had to retrieve my most powerful weapon—I needed it to fight properly.

I…

I completely forgot the pain.

The pain was simply gone

I…

My body returned to its best condition.

My hands and feet just stopped shaking.

"…What are you doing?"

"I…"

Things I hadn't thought about for a long time.

I looked at Oscar de Gardias.

"I… will…"

Words that made me who I am today.

"Win."

As I recalled those words, I stared at him.

In the end, Ender Wilton wasn't the villain.

The system, the events ahead, nothing mattered. At that moment, there was just one thing I could feel…

—I wanted to fuck up that son of a bitch.

After all, I was just a mad dog who was swayed by his own feelings rather something fucking vague as selflessness or whatever.

I wanted to win.

…So I would win.

‘Why can’t you do it?’

Ellen’s words came to my mind.

'I can just do it.’

‘Am I the same as you?’

I’d given up because I couldn’t do it. Of course, that was just what I thought. I’d thought that Ellen was a genius and I was just average.

‘Just trust that you can strengthen yourself with your magical power.'

'I’m already doing that, though?’

‘Why can’t you do it then?’

‘Am I just no good?’

No…

I didn’t really believe that I could do it. I tried to believe that I could strengthen my body with my magical power, but I didn't properly believe in myself.

Ellen can do it because she’s just Ellen. I wouldn’t be able to just do it.

I subconsciously had such doubts. I had been following Ellen for too long, getting to know just how absurd she was, so I’d subconsciously believed that I could never achieve what she could.

I had to eliminate that subconscious doubt.

I had to have complete conviction of my absolute victory.

I…

I could feel my magical power.

I…

I could control my magical power.

-Krrrrr!

“Wh-What?"

I…

I succeeded in strengthening myself with magical power.

Adding to that…

—I sped up further using Rapid Movement.

—I reinforced my attack power with One Strike.

—And I reinforced my body itself with Hardening.

I used all of my three skills…

With the power of Magic Body Strengthening on top of that.

-Kabooom!

I rushed towards Oscar with enough strength put into my legs that I managed to break the training hall’s floor.

-Gooong!

—An attack with three skills stacked on top of each other.

I didn’t know what to call that yet…

After strongly stomping the ground, I rushed forward.

And then, using one of my legs as the axis, I launched a side kick packed with all my strength into Oscar de Gardias’ abdomen.

-Boooom!

"…Kuh… Huk!"

With an incredible roar that was hard to believe could be made by a human body, he flew off to the other side of the training hall.

-Baaam!

I saw him fly into the opposite wall of the training hall and then collapse on the floor as he fell down.

-Thump!

Everyone stared with their eyes wide open upon seeing him planted in the wall and then falling to the floor, not moving anymore.

[Achievement - Path of a Superhuman]

[You have earned 500 achievement points.]

Astonished silence fell over the training hall. Even A-1 Grayden Amorell was astonished.

B-10 Ender Wilton had his mouth wide open.

However, my body was also a wreck. The pain in the places I'd got hit wasn't actually the problem.

I could feel my consciousness gradually fading because of that unfamiliar pain, as if my whole body was about to be torn apart.

Did I…

Did I actually endure all of this?

As my consciousness was fading, I shakily walked forward, desperately holding onto it.

I then spoke to the frozen Orbis Class students.

“Did… you… see?”

I spoke while putting as much force into my gaze as possible.

“Fuck, even if you mess with your seniors… a bit. Besides beating you up. They. Can’t. Do. A damn… Thing.”

My eyes were shaking violently as if I felt embarrassed and nervous to suddenly say things like that since I was a stranger to most of them.

"So… Damn it. What I mean… Just follow what I did."

Even if you get beaten up that badly, you won’t die. Rather, you might even make a miracle happen and knock out a senior.

—That was what I was trying to say.

“Don’t get scared! If they act like a fucking bastard, you just tell him to their damn face! Don’t just endure it! Just say somethin—… Kuhuk!”

-O-ooh!

-What’s wrong with him?!

“Uurg! Cough!”

I became unable to speak as I ended up throwing up blood.

No! Listen to what I have to say!

-Priest! Call a priest!

-I-I’ll get one!

I could faintly hear the desperate voices of the Orbis Class students.

That was the last thing I remembered.

CHAPTER 214

It had been a while.

An unfamiliar ceiling?

No, that should've been a familiar ceiling by then, right?

It was the ceiling of our dormitory's recovery room. It felt like I was always waking up there in similar patterns, so I was used to it by then.

It wasn't because I fainted often but because I needed treatment from the on-call priest quite frequently.

"…Ugh "

And then I felt it—pain, as if all the blood vessels in my whole body were getting torn apart.

It hurt so much that I couldn't speak properly. I didn't know if that was what it felt like having my blood vessels torn, but my whole body felt like it was on fire.

-Flinch

And it seemed like I greatly startled someone next to me with my soft moan, making them jump up. It looked like they had fallen asleep at my bedside.

"Y-Y-Y-You're awake! You're awake!"

Not knowing whether she was surprised or happy, Harriet de Saint-Owan let out a shout and hugged me.

"A-arg! H-hey! I-it hurts, dude!"

"I thought you were deeeeaaaaad! You! Yoou! You bad guy! You evil bastard!"

Harriet suddenly clung to me, crying, and the more she did that, the more I felt like

my whole body was hurting and burning up

“Hic! Hic, sob! Y-you bad guy!”

“I-it hurts, It hurts. Hey…”

I felt like I was going to faint again.

Still, I somehow managed to pat Harriet on the back.

* * *

Ellen had also ended up vomiting blood when she’d been forced to use Magic Body Strengthening for the first time. It was a side effect that occured if one used it without having learned the proper way.

I’d done the same thing.

It was successful, and I was able to make use of some explosive power for some time, but the price I had to pay was a lot higher than in Ellen’s case.

Ellen just vomited up blood but didn’t faint.

I vomited up blood and ended up fainting.

Four days…

That was how long I had been unconscious.

I’d fainted, and while in that state, I was moved to the Orbis Class’ recovery room. After that, I believe I was transferred to the Royal Class’ recovery room.

Not only the other students, but the faculty members were in a mess as well. It was already enough that I’d stormed into the Orbis Class dorms and fought with students, but then I’d suddenly used Magic Body Strengthening and had even ended up fainting while vomiting blood.

The results of that fight, so to speak, could either be deemed as my victory or a draw.

Oscar de Gardias had only fainted for a moment and stood back up, whereas I was

truly unconscious.

I felt like I'd won, but I also felt like I'd lost.

It was really vague.

Of course, I didn't really care whether I won or lost, but anyway, as I made that guy pass out with my last hit, I'd say I won mentally, though I didn't really win.

It seemed that the Grand Yoga Master who took care of Ellen's condition before was summoned once again to check out my condition.

He reassured the others that, while it would take some time for me to regain my consciousness, my life wasn't in danger, however, I was told that the others still came to visit me to check on me from time to time.

Harriet looked after me and ended up falling asleep on my bedside—that was when I'd regained my consciousness.

At the news that I had woken up. all the others flocked in.

"…"

Ellen was looking at me with an angry expression etched on her face.

Harriet was so surprised when I woke up that she ended up hugging me. Realizing what she had done, she couldn't even look me in the eyes, her face bright red.

"…Junior. Do you know how worried I was?"

Adriana seemed glad that I had woken up. It looked like she was insanely worried as well as slightly happy after she heard that I had done something so outrageous again.

"I was so worried that you might die and leave me behind!"

Olivia also came to visit, making a fuss.

"…What a sight. Do you have to do things like that to learn new tricks or something?"

Liana de Grantz shook her head. She probably said that because I'd ended up

awakening my supernatural power in a duel and also managed to use Magic Body Strengthening during something similar to a duel. Adelia carefully hid behind Liana's back and asked me if I was okay in a mumble.

"…I'm really getting tired of getting surprised by these things. Are you okay?"

Charlotte also stood there with her arms crossed, clicking her tongue.

Surprisingly the three idiot brothers and Cliffman also came to see me.

Everyone came to speak to me.

What the hell?

It felt like I was a good kid who was the center of everyone's attention.

However, in reality, I was just a guy who'd passed out after fighting with another class.

But actually, rather than only worrying about me, they also said things like "Did you cause trouble again, you punk…?"

Ellen in particular seemed really angry. She might have been worried about me while I was unconscious, but once I'd woken up again, she was angry.

'B-but I'm a patient right now, so she won't hit me… '

"If you have any excuses, give it your best shot."

Ellen came at me with ferocious force.

I really had no excuses to give because I'd ended up unconscious for four days after I'd suddenly felt like picking a fight with the Orbis Class.

I had to say something.

"It…"

"What?"

“It hurts so much…”

I couldn’t think of anything else, but I really felt like I was going to die there!

I didn’t know if it would hurt like that if all my blood vessels ruptured, but it hurt a whole damn lot.

It didn’t hurt that much when I passed out before I died of high blood pressure!

So, to be exact, it felt like the tendons in my whole body just crumbled. Although I’d never felt anything like that before.

If I had to describe the type of pain, it was a burning and bruising pain.

While it felt like I was getting roasted in fire, I also felt really sore at the same time.

However, that pain wasn’t external, but internal.

What I did was really crazy. When I said that I was in that much pain, the on-call priest sent all of them back.

As soon as he heard the news that I’d woken up, that Grand Yoga Master came to the recovery room. The man, who I usually saw as a hypnotist, then appeared like a god to me.

He was the teacher who’d also treated Ellen.

“Teacher… It hurts so bad…”

It hurt so much that manners and such all flew out of the window.

Do something!

“Do you know how bad it burns?” At my direct complaint of the intense pain, the Yoga Master smiled as softly as he did during class.

"It’s no wonder that you are in pain, Reinhardt.”

"Th-the level of this pain isn’t normal… Seriously… I think I’m going crazy…”

"It's a relief that you only ended up in pain. In Ellen's case, her excellent qualities protected her. However, that doesn't apply to you, Reinhardt. You almost destroyed all your magic circuits in your body."

"…What?"

"You almost became unable to use Magic Body Strengthening for your whole life. If what Ellen did could be compared to her trying to drive a much too big wagon on a narrow forest trail, then what you did would be like trying to drive one straight through the forest, Reinhardt."

"I don't know what you're trying to say…"

"What I'm saying is that you almost destroyed the whole forest by trying to drive on a nonexistent road."

I could understand what he was trying to convey to some extent.

Ellen had already been prepared to use Magic Body Strengthening, but she just put in too much power, which was why the road she built got destroyed—she'd used force beyond what the road could handle.

Ellen's magical power was ranked A+.

It'd probably ended up like that because the situation was really urgent and she'd put in everything she had.

However, although the amount of magical power itself was lower, I'd tried to strengthen myself when I wasn't ready yet.

It was inevitable that my body would be damaged even more in that condition.

I'd tried to drive my wagon prematurely and while completely unprepared.

Furthermore, I'd tried to drive it through a forest with no roads going through it, so I'd ended up breaking the trees in my way as I drove through.

Basically, the forest was a metaphor for my body.

Ellen's wagon was simply too large for her forest road.

And I'd just driven my wagon into a forest with no road and cut down all the trees around.

What I was doing was a lot more dangerous than I'd initially thought. I could have become unable to strengthen myself with magical power for the rest of my life.

* * *

If put in martial arts terms, I almost went into qi deviation. If I used just a bit more power, I might have gotten crippled.

I was glad that it only ended with that pain.

"Fortunately, you awakened your new talent, Mana Control. That's why things ended up the way they did."

"That's… right."

Mana Control…

Because of that talent, my condition wasn't any more serious than it could have been.

Without that talent, I would have had to pay a much greater price for using Magic Body Strengthening through Self-Suggestion.

If I hadn't awakened Mana Control by spending a lot of achievement points, I wouldn't have thought of fighting with the Orbis Class either, so that was what it was.

I'd lived thanks to that talent. If it wasn't for Mana Control, wouldn't it have been completely impossible for me to use Magic Body Strengthening in the first place? I had no idea.

In Ellen's case, thanks to her highest-level magic-related talent 'Mana Domination', she'd only ended up vomiting some blood and feeling dizzy.

I'd fainted because I had a lower-ranked talent and was then in intense pain.

In the end, I took a risk and managed to break through, huh?

"Then… Am I also going to learn… Magic Body Strengthening now?"

"That's right. For now, you should observe Ellen's private lessons. I'm sorry, Reinhardt, but your qualities are far inferior to Ellen's. Don't be too disappointed. Ellen is just far too talented. It's dangerous to learn how to control mana in a clumsy way. I'll be a little more careful with you."

The Grand Yoga Master patted my head lightly.

Just like Ellen had managed to realize how to strengthen herself with magical power through her own power, I'd managed to do that as well.

However, it was still different.

Ellen had managed to use Magic Body strengthening for quite a long time the first time she'd used it while I could only use it for a short while—less than five seconds, in fact.

No, it was even questionable to say that I'd awoken the ability. I didn't really know what I'd done, after all.

So I would just observe them rather than actually learn to strengthen myself with my magical power. My qualities were far inferior to Ellen's, so it was too early for me to actually learn it.

"First you have to recuperate. It will be rather difficult for you to move around for now."

The Yoga Master teacher rolled me over for some time, then sat me up and gave me some sort of therapy. In fact, the pain seemed to let up a little at that moment.

The aftereffects of Magic Body Strengthening couldn't be healed with divine power. Therefore, that Grand Yoga Master was the best teacher and therapist in the field.

If not for that man, I might have been unconscious for much longer or really ended up crippled.

"…How long will it take?"

"It will take some time for you to fully recover."

Anyway…

It seemed like I had to stay in bed for a while in exchange for having used Magic Body Strengthening.

* * *

After the Yoga Master went back, I just lay in bed, staring blankly at the ceiling.

The priest on duty said that there was nothing they could do for me, but still told me to call for them if I needed anything. Divine powers couldn't do anything about my condition.

There was always someone stationed in the priest's room in front of the recovery room 24/7, so it couldn't be said that there was a shortage of personnel.

The pain let up a little, but it was still awfully intense. Every time I moved my body, my muscles and tendons seemed to scream as if to tell me 'You'll die if you move even an inch.'

To eat, I had to set up my bed to do so, and the only thing I could eat was porridge.

Let's forget the pain.

Fucking hell!

Self-suggestion didn't work either.

Why didn't it work?! It worked when I was fighting Oscar!

If I looked at it that way, it seemed that the effect of my self-suggestion was obviously amplified in actual battles. Of course, the fight with Oscar couldn't be called a real battle.

It seemed rather logical that one unleashed greater powers in emotionally intense situations. No matter how many doubts I held, I was able to use Magic Body Strengthening, which I couldn't even fathom using in the training with Ellen, in the battle against Oscar.

In the end, from a writing standpoint, that was the type of supernatural power I liked.

Exploding with power in extreme situations… or something like that

Getting stronger when one gets angry… That kind of thing.

I liked those kinds of tropes when I'd written stories, however, if one actually had to use those powers, it was utter crap! Like, why couldn't I just use it to its fullest at any given time?

Although I was the second one who'd managed to successfully strengthen myself with magic power by myself, I didn't think it'd be that big an issue.

"While he did manage to strengthen himself with magical power, he almost ended up crippled."

That would be it. After all, there was the very overwhelming case of Ellen.

I thought that people would just think I was some idiot who'd flown too close to the sun and gotten burned or something, that I was nothing but a cheap imitation, that I was just a cat trying to be a lion and got hurt while tying. (HELP…)

'Pft, he goes around with Ellen all the time, and now that idiot thinks he's the same as Ellen.'

Would I hear things like that?

Anyway…

I did a lot more than anticipated and got rewarded with 500 points for that achievement.

[Achievement Points : 3430]

I earned 500 points for finishing the challenge, and gained 500 additional points for managing to strengthen myself with magical power.

I earned 500 points more than I'd expected.

Still, I didn't know yet if that was a good or bad thing. It seemed like I would be bound to the bed for a while, so I won't be able to go to class.

Not only that…

It was clear that the conflict between the kids would grow more intense.

No matter how much I thought about it, I would face disciplinary actions. I wondered whether the merit points would be enough to offset that.

But I'd just leave future problems to future me.

Right then, I was in pain and about to go crazy!

"Teacher…"

"Oh, Reinhardt. Do you need anything?"

Eventually, I called a teacher with my communication device.

"I'm sorry… but could you call Harriet de Saint-Owan of my class…?"

"Hm? Do you have something to say to her?"

"Yes, Sir. I have a big favor… to ask of her…"

In the end, I decided to use a cheat.

* * *

I couldn't move on my own, so I asked the priest on duty to help me out. It was already evening, so Harriet went straight to the recovery room.

Harriet seemed a little puzzled that I'd called her there.

"Idiot… You came…"

"Didn't you call me…? Sigh. Seriously. I'll let it slide this once."

She seemed about to get angry, but when she saw my pained face, she sealed that anger inside of her. Was she letting me off the hook because I was in that state?

What the hell?

Wasn't she even cuter than usual?

Should I just get hurt every day?

No, well, I didn't want to be in that much pain, though. Instead of being in pain for the rest of my life, wouldn't it be better if Harriet acted like that every day?

Well…

I was in so much pain that I'd rather die.

I didn't know whether that was normal or something, but I couldn't really focus on anything because of the fucking pain.

"Are you in pain?"

I felt like I was dying, so I was breathing quite heavily, making myself seem rather small.

If I had been fully there, I might have thought of another way to answer, but I was in so much pain that I felt like I might faint again.

"I feel like I'm dying…"

"Oh no… Then why did you do something so crazy…? Just for some petty revenge…"

"Not only because of that… there were… circumstances…"

I was like that, so I couldn't really rebuke. Harriet sat down on the chair located close to the bed and looked at me.

"So, what favor do you have to ask of me? Can I get you anything? Do you need something?"

Ah…

Although I really didn't like being in pain…

This might be surprisingly good.

That kid who always acted prickly towards me looked at me with eyes filled with worry.

It felt like she would do anything I asked of her—that was good.

Although she acted like that because I was in pain, I was 100% sure that it wasn't good to be in pain.

That waxing and waning mental state of mine was the clearest proof of that.

I didn't mean to ask anything hard of Harriet when I'd called her.

"Make me sleep…"

"…Huh?" Harriet asked, rather perplexed by my sudden request.

"I really want to sleep, but I can't because I'm in too much pain. So I have to somehow force myself to sleep…"

It was just too painful to stay awake, so I wanted to sleep. It didn't matter whether it was through sleep magic, sleeping pills, or narcotic painkillers. I wouldn't be in pain if I was asleep.

"Th-that… That's all?"

"That's right…"

I really hoped that I would just sleep until I got better, waking up in a much better condition. Sleep magic could be cast on enemies in Fantasy worlds like this, but there were no rules that stated that she couldn't cast it on me.

Sleep was a good thing.

—There was nothing better than that when you were sick. However, I couldn't sleep because I was in too much pain.

"Ah, that's… I… I've never done anything like that before… okay…?"

For some reason, Harriet's face turned red, and she seemed to hesitate a little, then she suddenly put her hands on my chest.

“L-lullaby… And good night…”

“…?”





-Pat, pat

I was completely speechless as I watched Harriet patting my chest. She was so ashamed of what she was doing that she couldn't even look at me, her face dyed crimson.

No, are you an idiot?

I was utterly blown away by her sudden, idiotic actions.

If I was in my usual state, I would have teased her, saying, "Oh. my, you idiot. Did you not get it or something?" but she seemed so embarrassed that I felt suffocated as well.

I never imagined she would do that. No, putting the misunderstanding aside, she actually went through with that?

"Th-that's… Not what I meant by… Sleep magic…"

"!!!!"

Harriet seemed like she would die sitting in that chair.

CHAPTER 215

Night time.

Ellen finished her training in the training room. She then headed to the restaurant.

She was speechless.

He'd just gone to the Orbis Class' Dormitory and fought with their students, and what's more, he'd fought with a senior and then passed out after forcing himself to use Magic Body Strengthening.

He had ended up unconscious for four days.

When Reinhardt woke up, all the worries she had before up and disappeared.

He was alive. He was safe. She didn't have to worry anymore.

Right after she felt relieved, she became angry.

She was so angry that it was incredibly hard to bear for her. She and Reinhardt both paid the price for the clumsy attempts.

However, she had been in a situation where her life was at stake, while Reinhardt only quarreled with a senior.

Ellen couldn't think of any reason for him to do something so crazy in such a situation.

She had a lot of things to say to him. *Just why are you in such a hurry? Why do you always choose to do such dangerous things?*

Don't ever do that anymore from now on.

I always feel like I'm about to die seeing you like this.

I felt like I was going to die, not you, when I saw that you didn't wake up.

If she said those things, would he stop?

She didn't know, but that was what she wanted to tell him. Would he maybe refrain from doing those dangerous things just a little bit?

Just what was the point of doing those things? Why was he overdoing it like that?

Ellen could only think of one thing.

Ever since the Darklands, the gap between them had grown even wider. She'd learned how to strengthen her body with magical power, and while Reinhardt had also become much stronger, the absolute difference in their strength had become even bigger.

So he'd even asked her to teach him how to use Magic Body Strengthening. It didn't work, but she'd tried to force it anyway. However, what frustrated Ellen wasn't that Reinhardt couldn't do it but that she couldn't teach him properly, but she'd tried to do it anyway.

So was that why he did something that reckless again? Did he think he might be able to gain something if he did something like that because he'd awakened to his supernatural power by doing something reckless?

He did that because he wanted to follow her, who had gotten too strong.

Ellen thought that was the reason for Reinhardt's impatience.

You don't have to do something like that.

Did Reinhardt not want to be apart from her?

If she put it that way, she could understand Reinhardt's impatience to some extent. She was angry, but she could somehow accept that.

As such…

As Ellen reached the dining hall's kitchen, she grabbed a knife.

She was always told that she ate far too much, however Ellen knew that Reinhardt also ate plenty. Something like the porridge they had in the recovery room wouldn't

be enough for him—she was going to make something.

-Tok, tok, tok, tok

Ellen used the knife without saying anything. She chopped up some vegetables and chicken meat.

She thought that it might be hard for him to move his jaw, so she only used the soft leg and thigh meat. She cut it a bit smaller than one normally would so that he wouldn't have to chew much to swallow it.

Previously, she hadn't known how to cook or anything like it.

There was no need to.

At home, her parents prepared meals for her, and at Temple, it would be the chefs. If she got hungry between meals, it was enough to just eat some snacks.

Various types of bread, jerky, sausages, and biscuits.

—Those things were enough for her.

However, they didn't satisfy her anymore. When Reinhardt couldn't cook anything for her from time to time, she didn't feel like letting those types of snacks enter her mouth anymore.

She was tired of them.

At those times, Ellen would cook on her own or didn't eat at all. When Reinhardt wasn't around, she was more likely to not eat anything, though.

She used to sit in some corner by herself and eat various things, but now that she was on her own…

She felt slightly…

Lonely.

No, I don't feel lonely, I'm just bored. corrected Ellen.

Ellen was no longer eating by herself.

She didn't know how to cook and there was no reason for her to learn it before.

However, she had learned.

She learned a lot by watching over his shoulder because Reinhardt teased her a lot that she should cook some food as well and serve it later instead of just eating his food.

Ellen was dexterous and had a good memory—that was why she knew how to cook most dishes Reinhardt made for her. Sometimes she would make them herself.

There were some things she could do without having to try. Ellen was able to bring those results because of her excellent specs.

Cooking wasn't an exception to Ellen's talent.

Honestly…

Quite frankly…

Ellen thought that she had gotten even better at cooking than Reinhardt.

She could make things that she hadn't seen before, but she could imagine how she could make the dish even more delicious after seeing how Reinhardt made them.

She didn't even have to try to know.

Reinhardt cooked by vaguely measuring the seasoning and ingredients, so had learned to predict how much seasoning should be added to make it taste even better.

So after watching Reinhardt cook a dish, she was able to cook it even better.

However, Ellen usually didn't bother taking the knife in her own hand.

When Reinhardt got grumpy and forced her to do it, she wouldn't make it perfect—a little bland, a little too salty.

Or she might deliberately leave out a core ingredient.

She would do those things on purpose.

Reinhardt would then ask her why she wasn't able to do it before eventually fixing it himself.

She was aware that what she was doing could be considered bad, but she had no ill intentions.

She just thought that if she managed to do a better job than Reinhardt and he found out, that he wouldn't want to cook for her anymore.

She was aware that those were just immature thoughts and that it was rather rude.

However, Ellen knew Reinhardt to some extent.

If she managed to cook better than him, it would hurt Reinhardt's pride. She often saw Reinhardt pouting while grumbling to himself as he cooked something for her in the kitchen.

He pretended to not enjoy it and to be annoyed by it.

However, when he thought that she wasn't looking, he would smile while cooking.

Ellen knew that he enjoyed cooking.

If he found out that she was actually better at cooking than him, that would take away all the pleasure Reinhardt felt while he cooked—Ellen knew that much.

He believed that he was paying her for learning swordsmanship from her. However, if it turned out that she wasn't only better than him in swordsmanship but also in cooking, that might hurt him.

She wanted to leave him something that he was better at than her.

She hoped that doing so would preserve Reinhardt's joy.

That was why Ellen never properly held the knife when she cooked in the kitchen.

Ellen still didn't know how to properly deal with people, but when it came to Reinhardt, she seemed to have figured out some things in order to get along with

him.

No.

In fact, that might not be the reason why he liked it.

Just because.

There were times when Reinhardt would cook just for himself as well.

Reinhardt would always cook for himself. If he wanted to eat more, he would just go back into the kitchen while accusing her of being too gluttonous.

If there was something he said he wanted to eat, he'd go and just cook it while grumbling.

If he was unable to cook it because he didn't have the ingredients, he would ask the staff to replenish the ingredients and would cook it the day after.

Well, he just seemed to like it for no particular reason.

It would taste better if she made it herself, but then he wouldn't begrudgingly ask her anymore what she wanted to eat and such.

If she didn't say anything, he would make some food she had never seen before, going "How about this then?", placing it before her and pretending as if he didn't particularly care while still secretly waiting for her evaluation.

If she liked it, he would give her a condescending look and tell her to be thankful.

If she said that it didn't taste good, he would take away her plate and tell her to stop eating.

That wouldn't happen anymore.

All those little things…

They were great.

That was the type of guy Reinhardt was.

He talked too much, was crude, and would only pick the most hateful things to say for no reason whatsoever.

However, he would still do whatever she asked him to do. He pretended not to, but he actually cared a lot about others.

And yet, strangely, he still had quite the dirty personality. He would get caught up in fights or pick some himself.

She still didn't know Reinhardt that well.

However, Ellen thought that this much was enough.

She was angry.

However, her anger disappeared before she knew it. Ellen didn't even remember that she'd ever felt angry.

She prepared the ingredients and boiled them into a soup without noticing that she was starting to smile.

Just as Reinhardt did, she cooked while unconsciously smiling.

She placed the chicken and the vegetables into the soup. She would boil them until the vegetables were crumbly. If they were that well-cooked, one could get away with not properly washing them. If it was too salty, it would be harder to eat, so she made it less salty.

Because Reinhardt ate a lot, Ellen made quite a lot. She thought that if he ate a lot, he would get better faster.

She poured the finished soup into a pot and then headed to the dormitory's recovery room. There were none of her classmates anywhere in the hallway or the lobby, probably because all of them had gone to sleep already.

* * *

She saw the priest on duty dozing off in the recovery room. They were sleeping with their arms folded while sitting on a chair, so they didn't even notice that Ellen came in.

While sleeping on duty might not have been a good thing, Ellen didn't bother to wake them up.

As she entered the recovery room, Ellen could see that Reinhardt was sleeping.

That was plausible, as it was late.

"E-Ellen?!"

"Yes, you're here."

However, she ended up meeting the eyes of Harriet de Saint-Owan, who was stroking the sleeping Reinhardt's head.

She seemed terribly surprised and retracted the hand that was patting him. Seeing that her face was incredibly red, it looked like Ellen had stumbled upon a scene that she shouldn't have seen.

"Th-th-that's. It's. Uhm. He-he asked me to put him to sleep. No! I-I mean not in that way! Yes. With s-ss-sleeping magic…"

Harriet was grasping for excuses, though they weren't really great, as Ellen just stared at her.

Was it really something that shameful?

Ellen didn't know.

While it was only for a brief moment when she entered the room, Ellen had seen Harriet's face as she was patting Reinhardt's head.

—She'd seen Harriet's warm and gentle smile.

She was making an expression she would never make in front of Reinhardt when he was awake.

She would never be able to show it to him, but when he was asleep, it appeared a lot on her face.

If affection was a type of substance, then that expression and that look seemed to be

oozing with it.

It almost seemed like it was overflowing.

Was it really that shameful for someone else to see that expression?

Ellen was a little envious that Harriet was able to make such an expression.

She didn't know why she envied her.

She just wished that she could also show an expression like that.

Ellen felt like it was useless envy, though.

"B-by the way… What's that? It smells delicious," Harriet asked while looking at the pot Ellen had brought with her, perhaps to change the subject.

"I made soup."

"Soup? Is it for…"

Harriet seemed a little bewildered, wondering whether she made it for Reinhardt, but Ellen just nodded her head blankly.

She'd made it for Reinhardt, but he was already put to sleep with sleep magic, perhaps because the pain was just too severe.

She had made a lot anyway.

"Want some?"

"Huh? Ah… C-can I?"

"Yes."

Although she'd made it for Reinhardt, there was no reason not to give some to Harriet. The two of them suddenly ended up sharing a bowl of soup with each other in front of the sleeping Reinhardt.

Harriet's eyes widened as she took a bite.

“It’s delicious…”

“That’s a relief.”

“Ellen, you’re also good at cooking…?”

The word ‘also’ revealed that Harriet thought that Reinhardt was also a good cook.

Harriet knew that Reinhardt and Ellen would cook something every night and that Reinhardt was usually the one who would cook.

However, Ellen was also good at cooking, but after listening to Reinhardt’s grumbling, she knew that she would hardly ever cook.

But because Reinhardt was sick, Ellen had managed to cook a whole pot of soup by herself.

Even Harriet’s taste buds, which had been accustomed to luxurious food, were satisfied by it.

Just what couldn’t she do?

Harriet ate the soup, little by little feeling a strange sense of defeat.

Reinhardt learned swordsmanship from Ellen, so he was stuck in the training room all day long if nothing happened. She had watched that a few times already.

The curiosity she felt towards their swordsmanship training was different from her interest in magic research.

No, she wasn’t actually curious about that. She just wanted to see what the two of them were up to all day long. Those two naturally became closer as they kept on training with each other.

There was also another thing she had in mind.

At the beginning of the first semester, Reinhardt, who had no talent, definitely had gotten a lot stronger. To be honest, Reinhardt in the first semester was a weird guy who tried various things without knowing a single thing and only had his hot temper going on for himself while he was physically rather weak and had 0 knowledge of

swordsmanship, weak physical strength, and 0 knowledge.

However, he had learned to somewhat handle a sword.

It was all thanks to Ellen.

Harriet knew that Ellen was talented beyond compare in swordsmanship as well as close combat.

It was only natural that Reinhardt got stronger after having learned swordsmanship from her.

That was why he still sparred with Ellen.

But…

There were some thoughts floating through Harriet's mind.

Reinhardt was smart, so he could have learned magic.

If Reinhardt had learned magic instead of swordsmanship…

Ellen was someone with no equal in the field of swordsmanship.

So Reinhardt spent all of his days with Ellen, as such, he got to where he was.

Harriet wasn't someone to be underestimated, however.

If Ellen's talent could be called the pinnacle of all close combat talents, Harriet's could be called the pinnacle of all magic talents.

So, if he had instead decided to study magic with her instead of swordsmanship with Ellen…

Perhaps they would have spent their time together in the dormitory magic lab all day.

This is how you do it. That's what it causes. This magic formula can be activated a lot easier if you think of it like this.

She would have kept teaching him like that.

While he wouldn't have been as good as herself, he would have become a wizard good enough to be put in battle. He could have stayed with her all day until their curfew passed.

However, that ship had already sailed.

Reinhardt had made his choice.

—Reinhardt was learning swordsmanship from Ellen.

And they didn't spend that much time together.

Harriet had thought about learning some swordsmanship in her spare time at one point. Learning the art of the blade was standard practice for noble children, after all.

She would have come up with some kind of excuse to include herself in their practice, or she might have joined his physical training.

She would pretend that she didn't know about her own desire to just be close to him.

Of course, she was also very curious as to what those two were doing in there for such a long time.

So she'd ended up observing Reinhardt and Ellen's training.

Their training was a lot different from what Harriet had imagined.

She thought that they had become close after sparring and talking a lot with each other…

But just watching them gave her goosebumps.

Ellen attacked him instantly while Reinhardt tried to hurriedly block, but he just fell, got beaten, and knocked around over and over.

As Harriet watched Reinhardt getting beaten up like that, she shuddered.

How can he do that?

Doesn't it hurt?

No, how is that training?

Do they have to go that far?

Such thoughts appeared in her mind quite often.

There was hardly any conversation between them.

'You're dead.'

'Be a bit more… gentle. I know, already… '

They only exchanged such short sentences with each other and repeated the same routine almost every day.

Of course, there was quite the amount of subtle physical contact between the two that Harriet was deeply concerned about.

However, it was just part of their close combat and submission technique training that was closer to punching, bruising, and pounding than physical 'touch'. If his heart was pounding during those situations, Harriet thought, it would be due to fear and nothing else.

She thought they became friendly with each other after training, but it wouldn't have been weird actually if Reinhardt held negative feelings towards her, in Harriet's eyes.

So Harriet didn't continue to watch Ellen and Reinhardt train because she felt uncomfortable doing so.

She couldn't watch them any further because just looking at them made her feel out of breath.

The desire to learn swordsmanship had completely disappeared from inside of her.

Reinhardt just kept on falling down before getting back up again.

Ellen continued to overpower him without being swayed by any form of emotion, not even properly looking at him. She just held the same posture and attitude towards him throughout the whole session.

Harriet thought that they were both people of extraordinary mental fortitude.

If it was her, she would have just ended up crying in some corner if she got knocked down once. Harriet had realized how complacent it was to think of learning swordsmanship as a hobby.

She realized once again how blessed she was that she just had to sit at a desk and read some magic books.

So…

In the end, Ellen taught Reinhardt swordsmanship.

“Did you know how to cook before?”

“No.”

So, as a way to pay her back, it seemed like she learned how to cook from Reinhardt—that was what she thought, at least.

“As I thought… Did you learn from Reinhardt as well?”

“…Let’s say it’s like that."

Ellen’s answer was rather cryptic.

Harriet was still imagining Reinhardt teaching Ellen how to cook.

Boiling potatoes, cutting vegetables with a knife, and the appearance of Reinhardt kindly informing her to be careful not to cut her fingers.

“…”

Only by thinking about it did she get goosebumps. She didn’t even know why she was so grumpy.

However, in reality…

‘Oh, Put that in there.'

‘Heeh, you’re done. Let’s see if this is worth eating.’

'It’s totally bland, you know? Are you on some sort of low-salt diet or something?’

'If it’s bland, you should add some salt or sugar, got it? Hey!’

‘Hey, I keep telling you not to stare at people like that while holding a knife.’

Harriet’s imagination and reality were completely different. Not realizing that, Harriet became depressed for no reason after imagining Reinhardt tenderly teaching Ellen how to cook.

Although she knew that that guy wouldn’t be able to kindly teach anyone for the life of him, she didn’t consider that.

Still, Harriet’s situation was better than before.

She’d managed to force that guy, who had been locked up in the training room from dusk to dawn, to become the president of the Magic Research Society.

Every week, on a fixed day, Reinhardt would have to show his face, even though he would grumble.

That was the kind of guy he was.

He would say strange things for no reason whatsoever and even say weird things to make her angry for no reason.

However, she knew that he would always help her out when it was important.

But…

Harrit looked at Ellen, who was still eating the chicken soup.

Did Ellen like Reinhardt?

Ellen definitely liked him, she thought. Otherwise, she wouldn't have cooked him that soup in the middle of the night.

However, she didn't know what she was thinking because Ellen's expression didn't really change much. She hardly even reacted to things, so such occasional actions as her cooking soup like that stood out even more.

Ellen was someone so different from her—she wasn't easily shaken and possessed great mental fortitude, enabling her to endure everything no matter what it was.

Harriet felt jealous of Ellen.

Just as Ellen was envious of Harriet in some ways, Harriet was also envious of Ellen in some ways.

What did Ellen think of Reinhardt?

While she didn't know the truth, she noticed that there was something between them at least.

She wished that the two of them were just friends.

They are just close friends, that's all there is to it.

I know that's all.

I know that they would never be like that.

Harriet could feel her cowardly desires welling up—the desire to believe in those thoughts.

CHAPTER 216

That whole being in pain thing kind of made me feel like a king.

Of course, only because I had so many people around me who genuinely cared about me.

I mean, even Harriet was willing to sing a lullaby and pat me to put me to sleep when I asked her to, even though she was very embarrassed by it.

What happened the day after was even more shocking.

On a school day, Ellen came to visit me in the recovery room early in the morning and brought some chicken soup with her for me to eat.

"…When did you make this?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday? Ah… I must have been asleep then."

I thought that she had come by while I was put to sleep through Sleep Magic. For some reason, I thought she would scold me or beat me up in the worst case, but she actually came and brought food with her that early in the morning.

It was really cheating to do something like that all of a sudden. I tried to take a spoonful of the food from the bowl, but of course it didn't work out.

Because my body wasn't in its best shape, it was only natural that my hands were trembling quite badly, making all of it spill from the spoon.

"…"

"…"

For some reason, Ellen stared at me for quite a long time as if she was thinking about something.

Eventually, she took the spoon and brought it to my mouth without saying a single word. Somehow, her doing that without saying anything… felt weird.

"…Did you really cook that?"

That was the first thing that came to my mind as soon as I tasted it.

'What the hell? Why is it so good?'

I couldn't believe she actually made it.

"…"

When she heard my shining praise, Ellen stared at me.

Well, look at that mouth of hers. Well, well, well.

"I'm good at cooking."

Ellened retorted as if she had actually been offended by what I'd said. She didn't cook often, and yet she was that good?

Although she acted like that, Ellen gave me a couple more spoonfuls of the soup. When I finally emptied the bowl, she scooped some more from the pot into it.

"Eat more."

"…Huh?"

Not "Do you want to eat more?" but "Eat more."?

"You need to eat a lot to get better faster."

Ellen forced the soup she'd cooked into my mouth with the spoon.

It seemed like torture, but in the end, it didn't feel all that bad.

* * *

Being sick really made one feel like a king. Harriet told me that I should call her

whenever I needed her, and Ellen made soup for me and even fed me herself.

However, I still didn't want to be there because I was in pain, I just wanted to get better

It really fucking hurt.

Anyway, I couldn't go to class for a few days, and it was even hard to just leave the bed.

The hardest thing was going to the bathroom.

I vehemently refused the offer of the (female) teacher on duty to support me, so I had to get there while using crutches.

It was fine getting there, but when I tried to get back, I fainted.

It was a good thing that I only fainted on my way back and not during the act.

I almost gained a new entry to my black history.

"Reinhardt, it's nothing to be ashamed of if you're unable to get out of bed as a patient."

"…Teacher."

"Well then, just put this on. If you go back and forth like this on your own and you faint, your recovery will be slowed."

"P-please don't."

When I strongly objected to wearing diapers, the teacher on duty put a finger close to her mouth and looked at me.

"My, you were unconscious for four days, you know? What do you think you were wearing during that time?"

"!!!!!"

A terrible memory…

Although I couldn’t remember it, I had already gained one.

I…

I seemed to have forgotten about that. When I’d woken up, I strangely wasn’t wearing them, though.

Ah…

“I-I don't want to wear those anymore, though! I don’t even remember wearing them, so it never happened!”

“Noooooooo!”

We ended up arguing like that for some time.

“Ehem.”

“Ah, Mr. Epinhauser.”

As the door to the recovery room opened, Mr. Epinhauser appeared.

“T-teacher! Save me! It’s still too early for me to wear diapers!”

The priest on duty let go of the pants of my patient's gown when she noticed that Mr. Epinhauser had entered.

No, but it was somewhat weird for me to put it that way, that would mean that I would wear them later.

While I didn’t know whether I would have to wear them later on or not, the words had already left my mouth. The priest on duty looked at me as if I had promised him that I would wear them later and went back to the priest’s office.

“Seeing you acting like this, it seems like this isn’t that big of an ordeal for you. Number 11, your voice sounds quite energetic.”

“…N-no, I actually feel like I’m about to go crazy…”

"It doesn’t seem like it though if you still have the energy to say things like that.”

No, it really hurt a lot.

However, Mr. Epinhauser's words that I wouldn't be able to speak at all if it hurt that much were true, so I had no choice but to shut my mouth.

He looked at me as cold as ever—his face held little to no emotion.

While he seemed and acted rather coldly, Mr. Epinhauser wasn't a bad teacher. He didn't really scold his students, and he didn't kick up a fuss or anything.

If he wasn't a bad teacher, would that make him a good one then?

I wasn't so sure about that either.

While he was stingy with his criticism, he was just as stingy with praise. Of course, he did end up giving me a merit point that one time.

Mr. Epinhauser performed his duty as a 'teacher' rather mechanically.

Did he hold any form of affection for his students?

I didn't know.

He didn't really discipline us, either. He would give demerits if what we did crossed the line and gave us merits if we did well.

If it was within the rules, we could do it, and if it wasn't, then we shouldn't.

He didn't let his emotions affect his work.

I didn't know whether you could call someone like that a good or bad teacher.

In conclusion, I liked teachers like Mr. Epinhauser.

He wouldn't unnecessarily interfere with us.

He didn't ask things like "Are you okay?" or say things like "I'm glad you're awake again."

He just said whatever he had to say, as usual.

"There will be a disciplinary committee meeting soon."

"…Yes."

"You will receive a summons as soon as you have recovered enough to move freely. Take note of that."

I had crossed the line that time—and by a lot.

Mr. Epinhauser only said what he had to say to me like a machine. He didn't say that I did something wrong or ask why I had done something like that.

That was why I didn't say anything like "it wasn't my fault" or something.

Well, I mean, it wasn't like I hadn't been at fault there.

"What part of what I did is subject to disciplinary action?"

"Two unauthorized duels with other classmates, and the use of supernatural powers during said duels."

Fighting was permitted in the name of a duel, but we hadn't gotten permission, and I'd used my supernatural abilities during those fights. While my abilities weren't extremely dangerous like Pyrokinesis or Electrokinesis, they were still supernatural powers in the end.

Using supernatural power offensively like that was certainly one of the biggest violations of the school rules.

"Is there a possibility that I will be expelled from school?"

Mr. Epinhauser shook his head at my question.

"That won't happen."

He seemed rather certain about that.

It wasn't that easy to kick a student of the Royal Class out of the school.

"However, this isn't just an internal issue of the Royal Class. The Orbis Class is also

involved. Besides you, two Orbis Class students are also being subjected to disciplinary action."

It was problematic that I'd gone and picked those fights, but those guys who accepted those challenges were also quite problematic. Therefore, Lilka Aaron and Oscar de Gardias were also subject to disciplinary action.

"If this was just an internal matter, the disciplinary committee would be composed of Royal Class' faculty, but since this matter involves both classes, the disciplinary committee will be formed by faculty members of both Classes."

The trouble I caused that time was different from last time; it couldn't be solved by the Royal Class alone.

Therefore, the faculty of the Orbis and Royal Classes would form a disciplinary committee and would hold a meeting for Lilka Aaron, Oscar de Gardias, and me.

I was rather sure it wouldn't end well.

It wasn't just the students of the Orbis and Royal Class who didn't get along with each other, right?

Weren't the teachers like cats and dogs as well?

However, in the end, they would still follow Temple's rules.

No one would tell me something like I had to pay for raising my fist against the imperial family, right?

I didn't know what the disciplinary committee would end up doing.

What I did know was that if I received an extended or indefinite suspension, I wouldn't be able to stay in the dormitory for that period of time.

I knew that because I'd written a scene where Ludwig received that kind of punishment for an incident. He got caught up in an argument outside of Temple with his friends that turned into an actual quarrel, so he and his friends were suspended.

Later on, they found out that it was actually one of Bertus's tricks

* * *

Anyway, during that suspension, Ludwig, Scarlett, Lanian Sessor, and Delphine Izadra took a short trip using the warp gates since they couldn't enter Temple's dormitory.

In fact, I did that because it was just too difficult to progress the story if they just stayed inside Temple, so I made them get suspended to force them out into the world. I'd just wanted to write about other kinds of incidents.

Anyway, I didn't know whether those incidents would still happen to Ludwig, but they would actually hold a disciplinary committee meeting against me.

I wasn't going to be expelled, but other than that, I didn't know what kind of disciplinary action would await me.

Even if I ended up getting suspended, I didn't really think that it would be that bad since I only had a bit of time left. There would be a lot of things I would have to do in that time.

* * *

There were quite a few people coming to visit me even though I was just lying in bed. Although I didn't have that much energy to talk, some of the guys who came by would just chat among themselves while I lay there.

Although we weren't actually that close, Ludwig even brought a bunch of his friends along to visit me.

He might've thought of me as his friend, but I actually didn't reciprocate such thoughts, though, you know?

Was I actually surprisingly shy?

Anyway, not only Ludwig, but even Lanian Sessor came around. He even offered to play some comforting music for me.

It got rather noisy, but that wasn't actually that bad.

I was the only patient in the recovery room anyway, so no one told them to leave

even though the B-Class guys gathered in there and made a lot of noise. The priest on duty didn't seem to care at all.

"Are… you in pain?"

Scarlett hesitantly asked me.

"…Yeah."

I couldn't just give her some empty words and deny it, so when she heard my confirmation, Scarlett closed her mouth and stared at me.

I didn't have that much contact with that girl. We'd just taken some swordsmanship classes together during the second semester. We did do some morning training together, but we usually wouldn't talk or anything like that.

But she seemed to have some difficulties dealing with me, but well, how should I put it? She seemed to have a good impression of me.

Quite a good one at that.

Why though?

I had a feeling, but I didn't actually know.

Scarlett said some more words like she hoped that I would get well soon.

All the guys from B-Class said a few words to me as well. Although we hadn't started our activities as the Magic Research Society yet, its members, Anna de Gerna, Christina, and Louis Ancton also asked me whether I felt better than before

Huh.

The others' reactions were quite favorable, considering that I'd picked a fight with a senior from the Orbis Class.

They comforted me even though I'd caused an incident. I thought that I'd lived like an outcast, so I wondered how that ended up happening.

* * *

Time passed as I continued to lay in bed.

Harriet told me that she would cast sleep magic on me if I couldn't bear the pain, so I should just call her whenever I needed to. Olivia and Adriana also came by from time to time, and unexpectedly, even the little senior Redina paid me a visit, nagging me for always getting in trouble as if she was an adult even though she was younger than me.

I couldn't talk back to her because she wasn't really wrong.

I would only ever get into trouble with guys who were older than me…

However, I wasn't actually just a year older than her… I was a lot older.

That was even more pitiful.

Redina also continued to nag me with her hands placed on her hips.

"It's even more problematic since you barely succeeded by using Magic Body Strengthening."

"Why? Isn't it fine? I got hurt pretty badly, though."

"Aren't you going to cause bigger trouble now?"

"…No."

"After you fought a third-year, you went and fought a fourth-year because you got a little stronger. Aren't you going to fight a fifth-year next if you continue like that?"

"No, those weren't my intentions at all."

While it was me who'd picked the fight first, I didn't have any plans on fighting the fifth-years. Redina just went on, shaking her head, saying something like "I don't know what I should do with a junior like you."

Although I hadn't expected Redina to visit, while she was already there, there was something I wanted to talk about with her.

"Anyway, since you came here, let's talk."

“What? Talk about what?”

“Whether you’re still in that Exodium or whatever pla-hmpf!”

“Sh-shut up!”

Redina covered my mouth as her face turned bright red. Then she groaned.

That chuunibyou club Redina was the president of… She seemed to think that just mentioning it openly like that was fatal.

“N-not now! Don’t! Don’t even bring it up!”

It seemed like she’d stepped down from her position as Exodium’s president after she was discovered by Charlotte and me. After Redina lifted her hand from my mouth, I asked her a question.

"Then, what happened with your other delusional friends?”

“I-I’ve passed down the position to another… Th-they aren’t delusional!”

Redina huffed, perhaps because she thought that I insulted her friends.

“Well, it’s a good thing that you quit.”

Redina had a Talent that couldn’t be simply called a supernatural power or a magic related talent. No Casting. That was why she thought she might be a dragon.

I’d planned on talking to her about it later, but since she went there to meet me in person, though for a different reason, I thought I could tell her.

“I’m going to create a magic research club with some other first-years. Join us.”

“…A Magic Research Society?”

Redina tilted her head at the invitation to join my club.

No casting.

The only problem was that her magic power pool was rather small, but it was true

that Redina was the owner of a great talent as well. She was already stronger than she was before, so she didn't really have anything she could improve.

"Yeah, that's it… Alright! Alright! I won't force you to join, but it'll be a lot more useful to you than you think."

"No, I don't even think of joining, so what do you mean with 'Join us'? You're my junior, so why are you ordering me around?"

Redina frowned, perhaps because the manner in which I'd asked her was weird.

Of course, I didn't respond to those complaints at all.

"Ask Harriet for details. It's kind of difficult for me to talk right now… By the way, do you know how to cast sleep magic?"

"Sleep magic?"

"Yeah."

"I know how to cast it."

As to not cause any misunderstanding, like with what happened with Harriet the last time, I mentioned it from the start.

When that Harriet suddenly started singing and patting me, I'd felt like I was about to lose my mind.

I couldn't even say anything because I thought that she would strangle me on the spot if I teased her.

Seriously…

I felt a ticklish-yet-strange feeling when she did that stuff. It was hard to describe.

It wasn't a bad feeling, but because I didn't feel bad about all that, it felt even weirder!

"Cast it on me. I want to sleep a bit…"

“Is it that bad?”

“It is…”

Redina looked at me, saying, “I guess it does hurt a lot if you’re looking at me like that.”

Of course, sleep magic wasn’t some high-ranked spell.

And it wasn’t like one could just unconditionally put one’s opponent to sleep.

There weren’t any crazy spells that would knock out one’s opponents right away.

I had to accept its influence without even thinking of resisting the spell’s effects.

I could feel that it was what one called magic resistance, and I also knew the concept of giving up that resistance.

It might not be as strong as Scarlett’s, but everyone had some form of magic resistance, and so did I.

So in order to be affected by sleep magic, I had to fully accept its effects on me.

If the level of the spell was too low, I wouldn’t be able to fall asleep whether I gave up my resistance or not.

“Okay, I’ll put you to sleep now.”

I got ready to fall asleep by closing my eyes.

-Tak!

Red Sun!

I slowly lost consciousness.

CHAPTER 217

"Hmm. Are you sleeping?"

-Tap, tap

“Urgh…”

"Reinhardt, get up."

Someone was waking me up from my sleep-magic-induced slumber.

As I had been forced to fall asleep to begin with, I was quick to regain consciousness again.

“Urg… Uhm. Hmm. Bertus?"

It was Bertus who’d woken me up. After that incident, Charlotte often came to see me, asking if I was okay and nagging me a bit, then she would go back, however, Bertus had never visited before then.

“I’m sorry for waking you up. I don’t have that much time.”

I looked out of the window to note that it was still night. The day seemed to have passed. Bertus apologized, but he didn’t look particularly sorry.

He sat in a chair opposite of me with his arms folded.

"Do you have some kind of disease that makes you unable to live without doing these kinds of things every year?”

"That’s not really what it is…”

It was probably because of the challenges that gave me points when I fought.

Of course, I couldn’t say anything to his scolding because it was still me who’d decided to do it. It seemed like Bertus tried to come and visit me to see how I was

doing, but couldn't bring up the time for one reason or another.

"About that business preposition from last time… I got the permit."

"Oh… Really?"

"I was going to leave it with you, but looking at your current situation, I don't think you can afford dealing with it… Especially with the disciplinary committee meeting coming up soon."

"…Probably."

"Should I send the permit to the gang?"

"That would be good."

Anyway, I was just acting the part, the ones who would specifically do the work were the gang members. So even if I was far away, there was nothing I could do about it. There was nothing I could have done in the first place, other than asking for investments and such.

With Bertus's help, the issue of the Rotary Gang's new business would go smoothly. I would have to pay him 10%, but that was still something we could afford.

Spending 10% of our earnings couldn't even be called a loss.

They were rather good conditions.

It could be considered a business in which Bertus held a stock worth 10% of our income, so it might give the impression that the Prince was involved in the business.

In that case, there wouldn't be any dumbfucks who would intervene in our business, try to gobble us up, or try to cut the prices. One could end up in a lot of trouble if one were to mess with a business the Prince was involved with.

I wasn't sure if Bertus was aware of that when he asked me to pay him 10%, but I actually would have paid him a certain amount anyway, even if he hadn't asked for it.

Did Bertus come here just to talk about the new business?

However, Bertus hadn’t left yet.

"Did you have anything more to say to me?”

"No?"

It seemed like he had nothing else he wanted to talk about, but he just stayed in his seat.

He didn’t mean to act like a nurse or something, right? That would give me goosebumps. Bertus just looked at me with a grim smile on his lips.

“You should have something to say to me."

“…Ah.”

While Bertus had nothing to say to me, I should have something to say to him.

I knew what he meant by that.

“About that senior?”

I should have been wondering about who that member of the Imperial Family I fought, Oscar de Gardias, was.

“Aren’t you curious?"

“Well, I guess I should be curious… I don’t know.”

I was pretty sure I hadn’t ended up touching the wrong person. I came to that conclusion because of what Oscar de Gardias said to me as we fought.

He was a person who was completely uninvolved in the succession of the Imperial Throne. There were only two, Bertus and Charlotte, who were next in line.

The rest of the Imperial Family, while they still were Imperial Royalty, were far away from the Imperial Throne.

Those that were far away from anything involving the succession were privileged but were also in highly unstable positions. Those family members were always subject to

purges because they might be used as sacrifices for sudden coups.

Of course, such things weren't going to happen in the situation where the Imperial Power was strong.

Still, while the members of the Imperial Family were able to enjoy luxury, their lives were rather cheap.

And since Oscar appeared to be completely disillusioned and hated his life, he wouldn't be an important member of the Imperial Family.

"You seem like you already know the gist of it."

I had no desire to ask about him.

It seemed that Bertus had already understood that I'd somewhat grasped Oscar de Gardias's position.

"Some people would rather be born as beggars."

Although they were part of the Imperial Family, they were rather envious of those born as beggars.

Oscar de Gardias seemed to be such a person. Just what rank did Oscar hold in the Imperial Family? Neither Bertus nor Charlotte said anything about me fighting someone of the Imperial family when they found out what trouble I had caused.

"If we wanted it to be a problem, we could make that happen, but you just need to know that it won't."

"…Thank you."

"You have nothing to thank me for. I'm not going to do anything in particular, after all."

Something might happen if Bertus and Charlotte were to accuse me of attacking a member of the Imperial Family, but neither of them intended to do that.

Doing nothing was already helping me.

Bertus didn't know much about Oscar.

Oscar was obsessed with something he obviously couldn't have. To be precise, he seemed to be mad at his position that was far, far away from the Imperial Throne.

Did Bertus and Charlotte not know about his obsession?

Would he die if they found out?

Oscar wouldn't be able to do anything, after all. No, if Bertus ended up taking action while keeping me in the dark, I wasn't so sure that he wouldn't end up dying later.

Oscar was a bastard, but that didn't mean I thought he deserved to die.

—So I didn't tell him Oscar's thoughts and what he'd told me.

However, it was Bertus who opened his mouth first.

"Reinhardt…"

"Yeah."

"Is there anything else you want to tell me?"

"…What do you mean?"

Bertus had no further business with me, but he seemed to think that I had some more with him, asking me things like "You don't have anything else to say?"

"Is there anything my dearest brother told you?"

"…"

Oscar, Bertus, and Charlotte…

—Those narrow-eyed characters.

Bertus, the pinnacle of all narrow-eyed characters, asked me with his friendly smile remaining on his lips. What more did I have to say about Oscar?

No.

He wanted to know if Oscar had said anything to me.

It seemed like he was asking me if Oscar had said anything to me when we met. Actually, I guess I should've looked at the things that he didn't say and go from there.

But well, he'd already told me a lot by not saying much.

Oscar de Garidas seemed to presumptuously dream of the Throne. Should I have told that to Bertus?

"While you don't seem like it, you strangely try to avoid really extreme situations. You seem like someone who would take extreme measures, but strictly speaking, you're not."

Bertus looked out the window with his arms folded.

"You don't seem like someone who would cover their bases, but in the end, you do."

I didn't know whether Bertus was disappointed in me or not. However, it might seem strange that I kept my mouth shut because that revealed that something might happen to Oscar depending on what I said. Even though we fought, I would've still felt bad if something happened to Oscar.

"It's just… he seemed a little jealous of the things you were born with."

In the end, Bertus asked me that while knowing of Oscar's jealousy, so I had no choice but to tell him what impression that guy gave me. Bertus grinned at me.

"As I thought, did you not tell me because you thought I would do something?"

* * *

"…Should I say I didn't want to cause any more trouble? What…? Fine. I have nothing to say. Sorry for hiding this from you."

"I don't think that much is deserving of an apology…"

Bertus was still smiling as he heard my apology.

“Reinhardt, do you want to be Emperor?”

“…Huh?”

What kind of bullshit was that?

As I froze, Bertus asked me again as if nothing had happened.

“Do you want to be Emperor?”

“…No? Not at all.”

“Why not?”

“…Well, because I think it’s a tough-ass job. I feel like it would be more of a pain than something good, and I would fucking hate not being able to do anything.”

I wasn’t just saying that because I was in front of the Prince. That was my honest opinion. A rich guy or the Emperor… If I had to choose between those two, I’d rather be some rich dude. With great power comes great responsibility, and I hate responsibility the most.

I mean, I already felt like I was about to explode at having to take responsibility for so many things ever since I entered this world. Emperor? I wouldn’t do it, even if you let me.

Bertus nodded, knowing that I’d answered truthfully.

“Yeah, that sounds about right."

“What are you even asking me all of a sudden?"

If you made me Emperor, I wouldn’t really do a good job, but I would just kick up a fuss, making everything fall apart.

“But what if you wanted to become Emperor?”

“…Huh?”

“More specifically, if you told me that you wanted to become Emperor to my face,

what do you think I would think?"

"…That I'm crazy."

"I guess so."

Bertus grinned and laughed. Oh, I could see his eyes slowly opening.

Just looking at that made me feel slightly bitter on the inside.

"You can't become Emperor."

While his words were completely natural, they had a deep resonance to them.

I felt like I knew what Bertus was going to say.

"I mean, no matter what Oscar thinks, I wouldn't really care. I'd just think "What's wrong with him?" and that would be the end of it."

I wouldn't be able to be Emperor. The fact that I might covet the position didn't actually anger Bertus.

Oscar de Gardias would never be able to become Emperor, so his greed itself didn't offend Bertus.

There was something Bertus once told me.

-What do I know of classes among ants? Beggars, commoners, nobles, princes, dukes, counts, barons. Why would I care about that?

He'd said that they all looked the same below him.

Oscar de Gardias was an ant.

He was just a delusional ant who dreamt of becoming the Emperor.

Even if I was the one who said it, it wouldn't have made much of a difference to him in the end.

I shouldn't have hid it. I'd just made his impression of me worsen for nothing.

“He might become dangerous.”

However, Bertus was just looking out of the window as if he wasn’t all that interested in my actions.

"There are some people who would try to destroy something if they can’t have it.”

Bertus mumbled in a tone of voice that seemed unfamiliar to me.

Anyway, it seemed like I wouldn’t get punished for having laid hands on a member of the Imperial Family.

Of course, I would have to pay the price for having broken Temple’s rules, though.

* * *

If I had known that the consequences of forcibly using Magic Body Strengthening would be that severe, I would never have done that. Feeling the time fly past me was even more terrible than the pain.

Was that what one called Catobophobia?

I was going crazy because I couldn’t exercise! I was literally wasting time to the point where I felt all I had built up disappear, so my impatience grew greater with each passing second.

I had to work out, but the more pressing issue was that, as time passed, the start of the Gate Crisis was ever approaching, so I couldn’t just stay still.

Of course, my body was slowly recovering to the point that my legs didn’t hurt anymore, and I could move around, albeit with crutches.

So even if I couldn’t exercise or train, I could go to class. I had gotten used to that pain, so I could bear with it.

“As of now, we shall conduct a disciplinary committee meeting on the issue of an unauthorized duel between the Orbis and Royal Classes.”

Of course, the first place I would have to go to was the disciplinary committee meeting, not class.

* * *

There was a quest.

It looked like a real pain as well.

I had no idea when it had appeared.

No, well, there was a quest when I had that duel with Art de Gritis before, but no such quest appeared even after I fought two duels. I did earn 1000 achievement points, though.

[Quest appeared - Disciplinary Committee Meeting]

No, but why did those kinds of quests suddenly pop up?

[Description: After causing trouble numerous times, you were finally called by the disciplinary committee. Rewards may vary depending on the punishment you received.]

[No punishment - 0 points]

[Volunteer work on campus - 10 points per day]

[Definite Suspension - 20 points per day]

[Indefinite Suspension - 40 points per day]

[Expulsion - 5000 points]

Really, why was that bastard doing that to me?

Shouldn't it be the other way around? Why did that bastard want to give me more points the harsher the punishment was?

Was he telling me to start a fight in there and get expelled? That asshat just wanted me to crossdress and act like a madman.

I didn't know how I would have felt about all of that in my first semester, but I didn't want to get expelled after getting all the way to that point!

* * *

The place where the disciplinary committee meeting was held was neither in the Royal Class nor the Orbis Class, but in the general headquarters of Temple.

Each school in Temple had an executive-level faculty member, the principal included, and the general headquarters was where the faculty members who managed all of Temple were located. Of course, their authority far exceeded that of simple teachers, and they actually had nothing to do with education or anything.

Ludiwig had only ever gone there once.

After he became the master of Alsbringer, they held a long, long meeting about whether he was allowed to carry it or not.

They'd held a long debate about whether they would recognize Ludwig as the rightful owner of the Holy Sword. And eventually, they had no other choice but to admit that Ludwig was the owner of Alsbringer.

He hadn't been there to undergo punishment like me.

So those guys weren't really important character-wise, but in Temple, they were very important faculty members who gathered there and took care of Temple's management to the point where their heads might explode.

Lilka Aaron and Oscar de Gardias were both sitting next to me in the center.

Although I'd lost, I wasn't actually defeated by Oscar, so it couldn't be seen as his win.

—So that was why his expression didn't look particularly good.

Lilka Aaron was originally a rather cold person, so she didn't even look at me.

However, she kept frowning because she seemed to feel rather uncomfortable because of the position she was sitting in.

Was she in pain? She should have already recovered from the wounds I'd inflicted on her?

I wondered whether she was simply in a bad mood then.

Around a long round table, the teachers of Royal Class were sitting on its right, those I believed to be the Orbis Class teachers sat on the left, and three faculty members of the general headquarters were sitting opposite us.

As soon as I saw the hostility emitted by the Orbis Class teachers towards the Royal Class teachers, it was more than clear that the problem didn't only lay with the students.

I couldn't see any particular emotion on the faces of the Royal Class teachers, including Mr. Epinhauser and Class B's homeroom teacher, Mr. Mustrang. The only thing Mr. Mustrang did was look at me and try to see if I was doing okay.

However, the expressions on the Orbis Class teachers literally spewed hostility.

Even the teachers had an inferiority complex.

It was driving me crazy.

And the faculty members of the general headquarters…

I could see a name plate reading 'Temple Vice-Chancellor Assyria Walken' in front of an old-looking man.

Vice-Chancellor would be the second-highest-ranked among all the Temple faculty members.

As there had been acts of violence between the Orbis and Royal Class, two schools specially managed by Temple, Temple's number two even showed up, although it was just a fight between some kids.

One of the most important subjects in the Empire, Temple's number two.

That guy would be treated as someone of much higher rank than most great nobles.

If it was just an internal problem, they would just solve it within the respective class, but it was a conflict between two different schools.

—And they were special schools, so the disciplinary committee had to be just as special.

The elderly Vice-Chancellor, Assyria Walken, spoke quietly.

"The details and circumstances of the case have already been reported to me, so we shall leave it at that and proceed."

The teachers had already investigated each of the three of us separately, so they didn't intend to repeat that again.

He read out some text on a piece of paper.

"First, Orbis Class, Year 1, A-5, Lilka Aaron."

"The student has continuously used violence both inside and outside of class against Royal Class, Year 1, A-9, Erich de Lafaeri any time they had swordsmanship lectures. Furthermore, they took part in an unauthorized duel with Royal Class, Year 1, A-11, Reinhardt, who went to her to retaliate, and she was defeated. As a result of the duel, she suffered injuries extending to internal organ ruptures."

Internal organ ruptures…

I had hit her with enough force to knock her out, though she was safe because of the priest on call.

I did that thinking that there wouldn't be any major problems afterwards, but I still felt uncomfortable when I heard that she'd suffered from internal organ ruptures.

"Next, Royal Class, Year 1, A-11, Reinhardt."

"The student decided to directly go to the Orbis Class's dormitory and impose private sanctions on the aforementioned in place of Erich de Lafaeri, as previously

stated, without trying to make use of the recommended procedure of reporting the incident to a teacher. In the process, in cooperation with Orbis Class, Year 4, A-1, Oscar de Gardias, he engaged in an unauthorized duel. Then, after injuring Lilka Aaron, he also requested a duel with Oscar de Garidas, who had organized the previous duel. As a result, he fell unconscious due to forcefully using Magic Body Strengthening. However, in addition to that power, he also used his supernatural power against both of his opponents. He should be the cause of all this."

The cause of everything…

I won't actually get expelled, right?

"Next, Orbis Class, Year 4, A-1, Oscar de Gardias."

"The student accepted to hold a private duel among students and attended it as its organizer without reporting to a teacher or having one accompany him. In the process, Lika Aaron's injuries weren't immediately dealt with. He also accepted a fight with someone of the lower years. In the course of that duel, the student of the higher year, who should have been responsible for their safety, fought the other student himself and even used Magic Body Strengthening in said duel."

Oscar de Gardias had also caused a lot of trouble.

While my use of supernatural powers was also quite problematic, using Magic Body Strengthening in a duel was certainly equally or even more problematic.

Even the fact that he, a senior, fell for his junior's provocations added to his crimes.

The one with the lowest amount of guilt was the one who was actually the underlying cause of that incident, Lilka Aaron, who had accepted a fight with me and lost, and the one with the highest was probably Oscar de Gardias or me, who directly went to the Orbis Class with the intention of fighting. It could be either of us, I didn't know.

“Do you have any objections?”

“”“None, Sir.”””

None of us had anything to add or subtract to the report. They were just facts, that was all.

I was told that I wouldn’t be expelled. Whatever punishment I might receive, I just wanted the disciplinary meeting to end soon.

My whole body ached because I hadn't fully recovered yet. I wanted to lie down and sleep.

I wouldn’t say anything in particular in the course of the meeting.

It obviously wouldn’t help my case if I opened my mouth right now.

It was also because of something Mr. Epinhauser had said to me—that my dirty temper would end up killing me, so I should just learn to shut my trap.

I couldn’t say anything to that.

It was only natural to think that anything the guy who caused the whole incident said would be detrimental. Additionally, knowing my personality, he doubted I would have had anything good to say.

I was just going to keep my mouth shut.

"Then we shall now discuss the level of their punishment from this point on.”

After he finished his sentence, one of the Orbis Class teachers raised their hand.

“I’m the teacher of Orbis Class, Year 1, Class A, Jaden. I suggest that Royal Class’ Reinhardt, who holds the highest amount of guilt in this case, be expelled.”

The high-score development appeared right at the start.

CHAPTER 218

The solemn atmosphere became heavier at the word “Expulsion”. At that abrupt remark, the Vice-Chancellor opened his mouth.

"What makes Reinhardt the most guilty?”

At the Vice-Chancellor’s urging, the teacher continued his explanation with a calm expression on his face.

“He tried to resolve a case of assault by punishing them privately, even though it could have been concluded by just reporting the incident to a teacher.”

"During said private punishment, Lilka Aaron was seriously hurt with her internal organs rupturing, which is enough to interpret his actions as deliberate attempted murder.”

"Additionally, he asked Oscar de Gardias, the former duel’s organizer, to fight afterwards.”

“And throughout the whole process, he used his supernatural powers that should never be used to ‘injure’ others. There was also another risk factor called ‘Magic Body Strengthening’.”

“Taking all this into account, we can only say that Reinhardt bears the greatest guilt in all of this.”

“In cases or quarrels between students and the exacting of private punishments, according to the school rules, depending on the level of violence, we can hand out a wide range of disciplinary actions ranging from community service, definite suspension, indefinite suspension, and expulsion.”

“Therefore, we assert that Royal Class A-11 should be expelled.”

They were just interpreting things however they saw fit.

She’d wanted to faint, so I’d punched her with the intent of knocking her out, but

they'd turned into an attempted murder.

The way I'd used my ability to strengthen myself became me using my supernatural power to actively try to kill my opponent.

They interpreted my use of Magic Body Strengthening similarly, I guess.

They were saying that I'd almost killed another student, and that I was the cause of all the fights.

Then they were saying that was why I deserved to be expelled. The expressions of the Royal Class teachers, except for Mr. Epinhauser's, seemed rotten.

The Vice-Chancellor gave no opinion as to whether they should go with that punishment or not.

"Teachers of Royal Class, would you please speak about Reinhardt's usual conduct."

It seemed like he wanted to check how I usually acted.

"I-I… I'm Mustrang, the teacher in charge of Royal Class' Year 1 Class B. Reinhardt is an excellent and good student who holds a strong friendship with the others and values everyone equally. This time, he just couldn't stand his classmates getting bullied like that, so I want you to know that he didn't do this with evil intentions."

No.

Teacher…

While it's good that you are on my side, that's a lie.

I had the overly powerful urge to retort as I was listening.

"I-in this case, Reinhardt was just careless. Originally, he was a good boy who wouldn't hurt anyone…"

"Stop."

Even Mr. Epinhauser, who had been silent, cut Mr. Mustrang's excessive statement off in the middle.

“Don’t lie, Mr. Mustrang.”

“Ah. That’s…”

Mr. Epinhauser intensely looked at Mr. Mustrang as he spoke.

No, well, it’s true that he was very insensitive, but how could he outright say that what Mustrang said was a lie even though he was supposed to be on my side?

The Orbis Class teachers were laughing and snickering at the ridiculous development as if they enjoyed seeing that sudden internal strife.

“I’m Epinhauser, the teacher in charge of Royal Class’ Year 1 Class A. I’m Reinhardt’s teacher, so I should know the best about Reinhardt’s usual behavior out of all of us here.”

“His behavior… could never be called good by any means.”

Hey!

You said I won’t be expelled!

“Reinhardt has been continuously causing bigger and smaller incidents since the first semester—from small fights between his classmates to picking fights with his seniors, and he even had a duel with a third-year student.”

Those comments seemed baffling to the Orbis Class and the faculty members of the general headquarters, as well as Lilka Aaron and Oscar.

That was the first time I realized what an absolutely random guy that dude was.

“It cannot be denied that he has caused small and big problems since then, but this is by far the biggest one. He responded positively to minor disputes and didn’t have a very good reputation among his classmates.”

“Yeah, this isn’t the only time, so seeing what the student has done so far is more than deserving of expulsion or even more—”

“Mr. Jaden, I’m not done talking.”

After cutting off the Orbis Class teacher's words who wanted to bite into me, Mr. Epinhauser continued.

"It was only in the first semester that his reputation was very bad. This is a report from the officer on-duty of the recovery room.

The on-duty officer of the recovery room?

What does that person even have to report?

Mr. Epinhauser presented some papers he had prepared beforehand to the faculty members of the general headquarters.

"Both students of Class A and B visited the recovery room at least once. Also, a significant number of students, seniors included, often came to take care of Reinhardt."

The priest on duty…

They hadn't just guarded the recovery room, they'd also recorded all the students who'd come by to visit me.

However, it sure was amazing that even those that weren't close to me came to see me at least once. Did some of them come by when I was unconscious or sleeping?

"In the first semester, as well as at present, Reinhardt's behavior can't be said to be good, but I believe it has to be said that his reputation among the other students has improved a lot."

My conduct was still bad…

However, my classmates as well as my seniors liked me.

—That was the message Mr. Epinhauser wanted to convey. My conduct was bad, and my personality was bad as well, but in the end, I was still doing well in my daily life at Temple

Damn, I almost thought that Mr. Epinhauser was throwing me under the bus. Although I was behaving badly, my reputation was good.

Maybe because the report contained more information, the Vice-Chancellor read it thoroughly and nodded.

“Apart from his conduct, it can be confirmed that he has very healthy relationships with his friends.”

“Wh-what is so important about his usual conduct and relationships! In the end, it doesn’t change the fact that Reinhardt violated numerous school rules to a great extent! Temple’s school rules! Those are Temple’s laws! That student has violated more than enough of them!”

That Orbis Class teacher with foam at his mouth seemed to try his hardest to get me kicked out of the school.

However, Mr. Epinhauser just continued his statement with an expressionless face.

"I understand the importance of the rules, and all the faculty members and students should also be well aware of these facts.”

“Mr. Jade, were you aware of the following rule within Temple?”

“Article one, paragraph one of Temple’s rules: Every Temple student is to be treated equally regardless of status and is to be granted the same educational opportunities.”

His words completely chilled the atmosphere in the hall.

“Temple’s school rules deny the existence of instances such as the Orbis and Royal Class to begin with.”

While he didn’t say such things there in Temple’s general headquarters, what he meant to say was “What rules are you ranting about when Temple never even followed article one, paragraph one?”

Those words seemed to make both the Orbis Class’ teachers and the faculty members of the headquarters as well as the Royal Class teachers uncomfortable. However, Mr. Epinhauser was completely calm.

“The purpose should come first, not the rule.”

“Temple’s purpose is nurturing talented people to allow them to contribute to the Empire’s society and elevate the value of mankind as a whole—that was the purpose behind the establishment of Temple.”

“The school rules are only meant to support that purpose, and if they are consistent with said purpose, then they are only secondary—that is what I think.”

"That’s why, regardless of status, regardless of the school rules, Temple enrolls a chosen few students in the Royal and Orbis Class and offers them special treatment.”

Mr. Epinhauswer was talking about Temple’s purpose, not the rules. Hearing those words, the Orbis Class teacher Jaden, who kept on arguing, exclaimed.

“What does that have to do with this case?”

“At the time of his admission, Reinhardt wasn’t a supernatural ability user.”

“!”

“While Reinhardt had no talent, and was rather lacking in physical strength, he was gifted with infinite aptitudes, so he was granted special admission into the Royal Class on his potential alone. He was an exception.”

“It’s a bit too late to go more in detail about this, so I’ll just give you the gist of it.”

“At the time of admission, Reinhardt was a below-average student with no talent.”

“In his first semester, Reinhardt awakened his supernatural ability during the duel with the aforementioned third-year, Mayarton. Additionally, a bit after that, he awakened the talent Mana Sensitivity.”

“Reinhardt is enthusiastic about all of his classes and training, and to this point, he has repeatedly trained with A-2, Ellen, an exceptional student, every day.”

“During their summer vacation, the students named Ellen and Reinhardt went to the Darklands. There, they cleared an S-Rank Mission, raising their adventurer rank from F to B. During their travels, they acquired a magical artifact. While I can’t go into detail about it, it can be said that it was a very important find.”

“Now, in his second semester, Reinhardt managed to use Magic Body Strengthening

on his own, although he lost his duel with the fourth-year Oscar de Gardias as a result. In addition, it has been confirmed the talent Mana Control has blossomed within him."

Mr. Epinhauser looked at Jaden with calm eyes.

"Put in simpler terms…"

"Reinhardt, who was deemed incompetent at the time of his admission, won a duel against a third-year in his first semester."

"During his vacation, he put his life on the line to save at least 50 people, uncovered the truth behind the devastation of some villages, and repelled more than a hundred zombies during which he recovered magical artifacts."

"And in his second semester, while he didn't win his duel with this Orbis Class senior, he also didn't lose."

"I shall tell you once more. Temple's Purpose…"

"Excellent talent."

Mr. Epinhauser looked at Vice-Chancellor Assyria Walken that time.

"Reinhardt is the most talented person within Temple."

Mr. Epinhauser valued me higher than Ellen.

Depending how one put it, the circumstances of the incidents may change.

The Orbis Class teacher wanted to frame it as a case of intenional attempted murder.

However, Mr. Epinhauser put it into a different perspective.

I was admitted as an incompetent bum, then fought and won against a third-year during my first year, and then, in my second semester, I did something as ridiculous as fight with a fourth-year resulting in a draw.

Would they expell such a talented person just because he'd violated a few school rules?

Had they forgotten Temple's real purpose?

When I asked Mr. Epinhauser whether I'd get expelled or not, he said that it wouldn't turn out like that because I was a student of Royal Class.

* * *

However, depending on what the disciplinary committee decided, there still was a good chance that I might've gotten expelled.

That was when he said that he wouldn't let me get expelled from school.

"Reinhardt's rapid growth also proves that Temple's education is very advanced and effective. Reinhardt knows his shortcomings and always asks for guidance from students who are superior to him. This could be called the real function of these special classes."

Ellen entered that school with masteries in many fields while I had nothing. The reason why I became so strong was because Temple's education was excellent.

What if it wasn't just Ellen who'd made me stronger?

It was the synergy effect because of the excellent talents who had been gathered there—that was also something Temple did well.

He offset his remarks about ignoring the school rules with praise about things Temple implemented well. The VIce-Chancellor was looking at me.

In the end, Temple's purpose was to cultivate excellent talents, so if I was a person who matched that purpose, he seemed to be thinking about lowering my punishment.

I could clearly see that the thought of expelling me had completely disappeared from his head.

However, the eyes of Jade, who wanted to expel me no matter what, were still burning.

"From what Mr. Epinhauser said, Reinhardt certainly seems like a great talent, but his abilities aren't everything. The personality to go along with it is also important,

and students who constantly cause trouble even though they are still in the lower years are not excellent talents, but dangerous talents. Continuing to support and educate a person such as him is dangerous! If Reinhardt had attacked her any more, Lilka Aaron might have died!"

Attempted murder…

That bastard seemed like he really wanted to continue pushing that narrative. The Vice-Chancellor's expression seemed to indicate that he couldn't just ignore that.

"No, that's not the case."

However, Lilka Aaron, who had been silent up to then, suddenly opened her mouth.

At that sudden remark, everyone's attention was focused on Lilka Aaron.

What?

Why did she suddenly speak up?

"I wanted him to do that. Really."

Hearing Lilka Aaron's words, Oscar's as well as the teacher's expressions hardened. She then looked at me.

"I didn't want to get up anymore. Although I didn't convey that to him verbally, Reinhardt still tried to make me stay down because he understood what I thought—that is what I believe, at least."

"Wha… What?"

Lilka Aaron, who was supposed to be the victim, suddenly defended me. To that, Mr. Jaden's expression turned rather dark, as did the other teachers' expressions. Lilka Aaron looked at me with calm eyes.

"Right?"

She was correct. Of course I knew.

"…Yeah."

Lilka Aaron didn't want to get up anymore, so she begged me with her eyes to make her faint. That was why I did that.

However, I never imagined that the girl would admit that there. The Vice-Chancellor stared at Lilka Aaron.

"I don't quite understand. You intentionally wanted to be attacked so hard that you would faint, and Reinhardt only complied with that wish?"

"Yes."

"A defeat is just a defeat. It would have been fine to simply surrender, why didn't you do that?"

Oscar's eyes widened at that moment when Lika Aaron suddenly rose from her seat.

"Wait just a moment, excuse me."

She started doing something no one expected from her.

-Rustle…

She started to unbutton her school uniform blouse out of the blue.

"Wh-what are you doing, Lilka!"

"I have something to show you."

While all the teachers were completely speechless, Lilka Aaron suddenly took off the blouse.

No, they couldn't help but know what she was trying to show them even before she took it off.

She took off all her clothes, wearing nothing but her underwear.

Everyone was appalled.

Not because she suddenly took off her clothes, but because of a different reason…

Her shoulders, arms, abdomen, sides, and so on…

Her whole body was covered in bruises.

“Reinhardt! Lilka is still so badly hurt! Just how severely did you-…”

“It wasn’t Reinhardt.”

Lilka Aaron looked at her homeroom teacher, Mr. Jaden, and spoke.

“I got hit by my seniors.”

“You asked why I didn’t just surrender? I thought that my seniors would treat me harshly if I lost.”

“Furthermore, if I actually surrendered myself, I believed that my seniors might’ve killed me.”

“I fainted, but I still got beaten this badly. Under no circumstances are we allowed to give up the fight if we don’t pass out. If I had given up, they might have hit me even harder.”

"So, I wanted to get knocked out on purpose—that was why Reinhardt did this.”

Lilka Aaron finally broke and shed tears.

“What Reinhardt did to me was attempted murder? He should be expelled because of that? Then… Then…”

She glared at Oscar de Gardias, her face stiff as she sobbed.

“Shouldn’t all the seniors of the Orbis Class get expelled? So why are you so angry about such trivial things? You all know what is going on. All the teachers know what the seniors are doing to us. The teachers even want them to do it, saying things like, ‘It seems like the kids aren’t trying hard enough. It looks like they have become lazy,’ that’s how they make them hit us. You did that… Knowing everything that would happen…”

Lilka Aaron shouted out to the Orbis Class teachers with a stern expression on her face.

“If he gets expelled because of something like this, shouldn’t all students and teachers of the Orbis Class just quit? It’s completely true that the Orbis Class should be abolished sooner rather than later. I’m more frightened and terrified of getting hit by my seniors and the teachers pretending not to notice then of getting a bit hurt in a fight with this boy.”

“I heard that Reinhardt fought with my senior because of that.”

“Everyone is scared, but no one can speak up. Everyone hates this situation, but if we complained or said something against them, we would only get hit harder.”

“We knew that nothing would happen, even if we told the teachers.”

"Reinhardt told us that we should just call things shitty if they are shitty—that’s why I’m saying this here.”

“The Orbis Class is a shitty and disgusting place. It’s a place that turns people into monsters driven mad by feelings of inferiority, and the ones that were victims before just turn into the same kinds of monsters to torment others.”

Lilka Aaron went to the disciplinary committee meeting with a completely different purpose: It was to reveal the true nature of the Orbis Class.

The reason why she’d seemed so uncomfortable since the beginning of that meeting was because she was in pain and hadn’t gotten treatment from a priest on duty after getting seriously injured.

CHAPTER 219

Lilka Aaron, who'd shown us her tattered body, put on her clothes again. Her trembling fingertips showed just in how much pain she was.

She'd endured the pain and hadn't gone to a priest on duty just to show them that right at that moment.

One could even see new bruises on her.

It wasn't over after she got hit once, she was continuously beaten up.

It was a disciplinary committee meeting to decide students' punishments.

However, the Vice-Chancellor of Temple was also present.

If the meeting was just held within the Orbis Class, Lilka Aaron's words would have been useless. The teachers didn't want to destroy that system either. They didn't hit them directly, but with just a few words they made the seniors want to make the other students work harder on their own.

Far from wanting to destroy it, they even encouraged its existence.

Oscar de Gardias's expression seemed a little strange.

While it seemed stiff, he wore a strange smile on his lips.

—As if he found the situation amusing.

Vice-Chancellor Assyria Walken looked at the Orbis Class teaching staff, whose faces were deathly pale.

New sinners to be judged had appeared.

"Is what Lilka Aaron said true?"

"……"

“As it appears, I guess it’s true."

Just by looking at the Orbis Class teachers who couldn’t give him an answer, Assyria Walken seemed to have already gotten the answer.

Extreme violence committed among students and teachers who even encouraged it.

A new problem had come to the forefront.

“I knew the atmosphere surrounding the Orbis Class was coercive and rigid, but was it to such an extent?”

As Temple’s Vice-Chancellor, it seemed like Assyria Walken had some guesses, but it didn’t look like he expected that the level of violence the seniors inflicted on their juniors would be that high.

Mr. Epinhauser didn’t look that surprised, and Mr. Mustrang seemed startled and very worried. No, was that guy actually sniffling?

However, in that atmosphere, one of the Orbis Class teachers spoke up.

“I don’t think this is something we should discuss here. We should only talk about the matters we decided to hold the current disciplinary committee meeting about, we can hold this discussion in another place later…”

“Yes, that is right.”

Assyria Walken nodded at his words…

“It isn’t something we should discuss here. However, before we are even able to hold another disciplinary committee meeting, or mediation committee meeting, this student named Lilka Aaron… It seems obvious what the other Orbis Class students would do to her. No, I don’t think we will be able to talk about this any other time.”

Cruelty and violence is what she would receive. If Likla Aaron went back to the Orbis Class dorms like that, she might’ve been better off dead.

“It seems like we have to take immediate actions against the Orbis Class."

Assyria Walken gathered up the report and shoved it into his desk.

"This disciplinary committee meeting is on hold."

Will you look at that hot-blooded guy?

"I believe the Orbis Class' issue is a far more pressing matter."

Assyrian Walken decided to focus on that topic immediately, setting the current one aside.

"All first years of the Orbis Class are to be summoned to the main building."

And he also predicted that, if they put off the matter for any amount of time, they might use their power against the students inside Orbis Class.

My crazy act of fighting with the Orbis Class…

It was transformed into a completely unexpected event that might blow away the whole Orbis Class.

If that was the case, what would happen next was more than obvious.

[Special Achievement - Inflection Point of History (Orbis Class)]

[History has changed dramatically due to your actions.]

[Acquired 1000 achievement points.]

My total achievement points, which had fallen to 2000 points, had recovered to around 4000.

That was why I just couldn't stop making trouble.

* * *

The disciplinary committee meeting event ended up with no conclusion, as the meeting itself was put on hold.

As someone who knew the future to some extent, if not completely, I felt quite strange whenever I experienced the results of the butterfly effect.

When I'd first seen Erich de Lafaeri beaten up by Lilka Aaron, I didn't think things would turn out like that.

I'd gone to the Orbis Class dorm to earn some achievement points, check on the Orbis Class' key figures, and to fight Lilka Aaron.

And then, unable to push down his own temper, I'd fought Oscar de Gardias, who constantly acted arrogant.

What I showed those guys was that, even if they went against their seniors, they wouldn't beat them to the point of killing them.

I was right in a way. Even though Lilka Aaron did end up passing out, she was still nearly beaten to death.

No matter what they did, they would just end up getting hit anyway.

So why didn't they just rebel then?

While what I did could be called unnecessary meddling, it'd still brought about a reaction. That was how much they had suffered. They were just hoping for someone to make the first step.

How someone of the Royal Class could take that step, and not someone of the Orbis Class, felt like a slap to the face to them.

Anway, the disciplinary committee meeting had been put on hold, so we, as well as the teachers, left the main building.

The way the teachers were looking at Lilka Aaron was more akin to how one would look at a traitor, not a student.

I didn't really have a proper conversation with Lilka Aaron.

To be honest, even though the situation was bad, she had no good reason to actually step up.

Was it something like, ‘We conveyed our feelings through our fists back then.’? She’d wanted to faint, so I'd made her pass out.

It was weird.

I couldn’t believe that was how I’d ended up buying someone’s favor. I really didn’t know how this world worked. Standing still in front of the main building, I asked Lilka, who stood with her head turned to me, something.

“You… are you alright?”

“……I don’t want to hear that from someone in your condition.”

While Lilka Aaron was also in tatters, I was walking on crutches, still limping. It seemed rather ridiculous for me to ask her if she was okay.

“If nothing changes even after I did this much, I’ll drop out or move to one of the regular classes.”

She seemed to have been prepared for everything. She had to sacrifice too much and was subject to too many obligations just for the privilege of being in the Orbis Class.

Lilka Aaron seemed to have realized that it would be much better to just give up on all that than try to bear with it any longer.

All those students held on because they didn’t want to be stigmatized as someone who dropped out of a special class. However, she had finally decided to not put up with it any longer.

“I’m not the only one who wants to drop out. We all think alike.”

Lilka Aaron wasn’t alone in her mindset.

She didn’t just do things on her own accord, but Lilka was the one who decided to take the lead.

So I could somewhat understand why that event turned into an inflection point in history.

This incident might lead to a mass dropout of all Orbis Class first-years if nothing

changes.

"Anyway, I didn't really want to say it, but…"

Lilka Aaron, whose stature was rather short, looked up at me.

"I'm grateful to you."

A lot of things had changed because of that single fight between us.

All of them came together and were determined to change the system.

Hopefully, with that, Ender Wilton's incident would disappear as well.

There shouldn't be a need for him to get involved with black magic and turn into a monster if history changed.

If that guy's desire for power came from the abuse and coercion of his seniors, if that case was resolved successfully, then that incident would disappear quite easily.

However, if Ender Wilton involved himself with black magic out of his personal desire for power and sense of inferiority, then it still might happen.

It was still up in the air.

I had to take action as soon as things were clear. If he got involved in it because of someone else or inevitably got in contact with it somehow, I had to do something about that.

And…

"……"

Oscar de Gardias, who left the building a little bit later than us, looked at the two of us.

Then he passed us by without saying a single word.

He wore a strange smile on his face.

The teachers and seniors of the Orbis Class were literally about to get kicked out…

So, why was he smiling?

An unfamiliar chill ran down my spine.

* * *

On my way back to Royal Class' dormitory after splitting up with Lilka Aaron…

I was on the tram with the Royal Class teachers who'd attended the disciplinary committee meeting.

"Really, how could they do that? How could the teachers condone those seniors' actions…"

Mr. Mustrang let out a sigh in anger as he felt sorry for the Orbis Class students who were exposed to such a coercive and violent environment.

"Reinhardt. The disciplinary committee meeting isn't over yet, it's just put on hold, so don't cause any more trouble, okay?"

"Yeah, yeah."

Mr. Mustrang warned me quite a lot…

Mr. Mustrang, the teacher in charge of Class B, was a very compassionate teacher. I'd set him up as someone who was nice, good-hearted, and good to his students—he was a teacher who fit right in with Class B's atmosphere.

Most of the kids who were part of Class A were rude and arrogant, so I'd set their teacher up to be cold and distant as well—he also fit very well to the Class' atmosphere.

However, I was able to witness a different facet of Mr. Epinhauser that I hadn't been familiar with.

He'd defended me in a cold and collected tone.

It was more than certain that my conduct was bad, but my relationships were very

healthy.

Temple's purpose was to cultivate excellent talents, and Reinhardt, me, was the most excellent power in Temple. There was no reason to kick someone like that to the curb.

His way of defending me was very much like him. Mr. Epinhauser was still looking out of the tram's window, no matter what Mr. Mustrang mumbled, as if nothing had happened.

However, I had to say what I had to say.

"Teacher, thank you for today."

I didn't expect Mr. Epinhauser to defend me that much and even exaggerate my worth to such an extent. Temple's greatest talent… He hadn't meant Ellen Artorius with that.

"What do you mean?"

"…Huh?"

"You have no reason to thank me."

Mr. Epinhauser kept his eyes fixed on the window as he spoke to me.

It seemed like he didn't even think that it was something to be grateful for.

He didn't praise me or wish me good luck for the future—he said nothing like that.

It is a teacher's job to protect their students, that was all I did.

That was how he seemed to think. Mr. Epinhauser didn't even want me to thank him.

The more I looked at that guy, the stranger he seemed. Was he embarrassed?

"Well, I can't really believe that I'm supposed to be the most talented. Isn't that a bit exaggerated?"

So I tried to subtly ask him why he'd deliberately used such a forced lie to shield me.

To be honest, I didn't think that much of it.

At that moment, Mr. Epinhauser turned to look at me.

"Opinions may vary from person to person, but I certainly think that you are."

"……What?"

No.

Was that guy serious?

Seeing that I didn't seem to understand what he meant, Mr. Epinhauser continued to speak quietly, still looking at me.

"Number two entered the school already completely trained, but you are reaching your completion in Temple."

Unlike Ellen, I had been growing at a frightening pace after I'd entered the school without any previous training. Mr. Epinhauser seemed to evaluate me by the speed I had reached my strength, not by how much strength I possessed.

No, but I still was very flustered.

What should I say to that? It felt really weird to be praised by someone wearing that kind of expression.

"Ellen already knows how to use Magic Body Reinforcement, though?"

"You managed to use it recently as well:"

No, but the side effects we suffered from were vastly different, right?

With that, I was completely sure that the guy really thought that I was the most talented person in Temple.

—Because he spoke so seriously when he said it…

Still, this is a bit…

* * *

My work involving the Orbis Class had finished, but that was only the beginning.

The Temple Headquarters had realized that the circle of abuse spreading inside of the Orbis Class could never be resolved from within. They seemed to have decided to take reasonable and immediate action to start with.

Because, if they waited just a little bit, it was certain that the students would be internally silenced. It seemed like they decided to first put the Orbis Class first-years, who were merely victims, under the protection of the Temple headquarters.

Soon, the entire Orbis Class was issued an emergency order to immediately close down the school.

Additionally, that school closure was not to be lifted until all of the Class' internal problems were completely resolved. A significant number of students as well as teachers were also at risk of expulsion.

Those who were part of special classes were treated like special entities, both in Temple and the Imperial Capital.

However, as long as there had been internal problems and their degree was severe enough, some might even be sentenced to serve time in prison.

To be honest, the marks engraved on Lilka Aaron's body seemed terrifying, even to me.

How could someone beat another person up like that just because they'd lost a fight? It was quite appalling.

Because I could finally move around again, I could go to classes again with crutches.

Friday. We were on our way back after our Demon Ecology class.

Ellen, Liana, Harriet, and I all took part in that class.

"You destroyed the whole Orbis Class with just a single fight."

"It's the disciplinary committee who did all that. I didn't even say anything, you

know?"

I mumbled nervously at Harriet's half-teasing remark. Honestly, I didn't expect the incident to get that big.

I wasn't the one who'd talked to the disciplinary committee about that. It was Lilka Aaron and the other first-year kids who'd set the stage to fuck over their seniors.

With that being said, I couldn't say that I didn't have any influence on them, though.

In the end, it was true that I was the one that'd pushed over the first domino in the chain. If I'd left them alone, the Orbis Class would have just gotten worse. Harriet, in a slightly sulky voice, asked me if I felt good about myself.

"The scale of the trouble you cause is getting bigger and bigger, you know? Honestly, what are you going to do next? Destroy Temple?"

Wow, I had gotten used to being teased, so I tried not to lose it anymore during those kinds of debates.

That's right, my tolerance had grown.

My temper really evolved…

"Harriet, I'm afraid that bastard might actually do that."

Liana looked at me, seeming a little scared that Harriet's teasing words might actually come true.

"I knew that this nut job was on a totally different level, but to barge into the Orbis Class on his own, fight their students, and even put hands on a senior in his fourth year…"

Even Liana, who was quite cool-headed, seemed to have been genuinely shocked by my deeds that time. In my head, I could see that my career as a crazy bastard had advanced several levels.

Ellen, who was also with us, just quietly walked next to me, not reacting no matter what we talked about.

“Slower.”

However, Ellen then suddenly opened her mouth.

“…Huh?"

“Let’s walk slower.”

She pointed at me. Only then did they realize that they had been walking a bit too fast for me, who had to walk with crutches, so they slowed down a bit.

Harriet’s face was slightly red, and Liana scratched her cheek slightly.

“Oh, did you now realize that you’ve been cursing out a patient, you devil spawns?”

No…

I mean, the spawn of the devil would be a demon, right? So I was the actual devil spawn there.

Both of them seemed to feel a bit apologetic towards me after they heard that, so they didn’t complain.

As expected, the only one on my side was Ellen! I looked towards her.

“While you’re at it, could you carry me on your back?”

Give me a piggyback ride! You fed me last time! Take care of me more!

“…I don’t want to do that.”

Ellen distanced herself from me slightly, put off by my blatant shamelessness. Liana and Harriet both looked at me in astonishment.

“Wow, you’re totally acting like a baby.”

Liana’s venomous words left me completely speechless. No, but If one was sick, wasn’t it normal to regress just a little bit?!

Of course, with the way I was acting, one might suspect that I had dementia!

Those crutches.,,

They were really fucking annoying. Actually, the pain hadn't completely faded away yet, so my whole body was still tingling.

-Trip!

"Urg!"

I was walking rather well until I was about to trip over my crutches. Ellen caught me at lightning speed.

When she helped me up, she anxiously asked me something.

"Are you okay?"

What the hell?

I couldn't believe how quickly she'd caught me as soon as I was about to fall.

Did my heart skip a beat just then? I trembled, unable to figure out what to do.

"Should I give you a piggyback ride?"

"!"

Ellen actually was ready to give me a piggyback ride because she thought that I was having a hard time.

Harriet, Liana, and I felt as if our hearts had just stopped at Ellen's serious proposal.

"I-I was just kidding, man… I can walk…"

What Liana said while we were in her villa on the Edina Islands was right…

I would talk big, but when it turned out that the other person was actually serious, I would chicken out.

Ultimately, I was similar to Olivia Lanze in that way.

CHAPTER 220

An inflection point in history.

So far, there had been three in total.

The first was the survival of Charlotte de Gardias.

As a result, the events of the main story changed significantly, but the survival of such a character was inevitably worth the effort of changing history.

The second one was the survival of Olivia Lanze.

Olivia had strong divine powers, and although I don't know what to call it, she could also use a different form of divine(?) power. Whatever she might do in the future, she would be a great person that would achieve at least one great thing.

The special achievement 'inflection point of history' seemed to focus on changing the whole history of this world rather than just the main story.

Of course, history was constantly changing and shifting, in big or small ways, as long as I existed to change it. The terrorist attack on the Imperial Capital from last time was also quite the big event, but I wasn't granted the inflection point of history achievement for it.

This world did whatever it wanted whenever it wanted anyway, so it would give me that achievement at times and at others it simply wouldn't.

However, at that time, it did. In any case, that event was definitely going to change history by a lot.

The third inflection point of history.

The Orbis Class Incident.

The whole Orbis Class was put under an emergency closure.

That would lead to major changes in the character compositions.

I was actually able to confirm one thing that had changed directly.

“It looks like we won’t be able to compete against each other anymore during the festival.”

“We definitely won’t. Even if things get resolved, they surely aren’t in any position where they could show their faces at official events like that for some time.”

“Is that so?”

“Probably.”

That was the answer I gave upon hearing Harriet’s words.

Rumors about the Orbis Class’ internal problems seemed to have spread all over Temple after some time.

So, that incident aside, they didn’t have the luxury to leisurely enjoy festivals or any other enjoyable activities.

The main event of the second semester…

It immediately evaporated because of the fight I caused.

It was correct to call that an inflection point of history. A big part of the main story had been blown away, after all. The tournament and all related activities were gone.

I couldn’t believe I’d destroyed that arc's main event while trying to stop Ender Wilton from falling into ruin.

Was that… was this the right thing to do?

Anyway, that wasn’t what was important.

Harriet and I were standing in front of a building, and I still had my crutches with me.

Since I couldn't do any personal training, I'd decided to push that part of my schedule aside for the period I'd be in recovery. When my body recovered more, I would completely focus on my personal improvement.

Even though I could still be considered a patient, I was still working all over the place while supporting my body with those crutches.

Wasn't I hella diligent?

I was about to faint from the admiration I felt for myself.

"Is this our club room?"

"Yeah. Although, I don't know if we should call this a room."

There wasn't just Harriet and me, but all the others as well. Louis Ankton, Adelia, Christina, Anna. And our little senior, Redina.

She had accepted my offer.

All of them were members of the Magic Research Society.

[Royal Class Magic Research Society]

That was what stood engraved on the plaque before me. However what I was standing in front of wasn't a room but a fairly large building.

That couldn't be called a club room, it was a whole-ass club house, or even a club research institute. What the hell was up with that?

The Magic Research Society wasn't just some club where we would gather to chat, but it still took a while to get permission because there was a lot of equipment required for our activities. So they had a lot of things to prepare on Temple's side before we could officially start club activities.

It seemed like Royal Class' magic majors tended to do a lot of personal research

without being part of any club, so we were the first to create a club like that.

As such, the faculty of th Royal Class seemed to have agonized over what they needed to prepare for us, and eventually came up with a rather special alternative.

"…I can't believe they actually emptied out one of the labs for us."

They didn't prepare anything, they just gave us a place where we'd find anything we might need. It was said that the place was used as a research lab by one of the wizard professors, however when they'd asked if the Royal Class could use it, he'd willingly given it up, saying that we could just take it.

He would just need to get a bigger research lab.

That building wasn't actually that large of a facility, but it was still large enough that I wondered if we could really use it. I mean, it was just too luxurious to use as a students' club "room".

Everyone was looking around the club villa, admiring it each in their own way. I didn't really know much about the equipment, so I just sat somewhere in the middle of the hall.

-Wow. What's this?

-This is my first time seeing something like this…

-This is a mana stone fusion furnace…

-Junior, junior. What's this?

-Ah, this is…

Even the magic majors seemed to have seen a lot of that equipment for the first time that day, while Harriet and Louis Ankton were able to name quite a lot.

Harriet recognized most of it because she was the young lady of the Duchy of Saint-Owan, famous for their advancement in the field of magic, and Louis seemed to recognize a lot of them because he'd seen them in books.

After they took quite a long time to go around the building once, everyone gathered

at the main hall again.

“What’s with that reaction? We were able to get such a great place.”

Harriet stared at me, seeming annoyed by my dull reaction.

“What the hell am I supposed to like about this place…?”

I didn’t even know what most of those things were. Well, they looked pretty cool. What other reaction did she want me to have? I still didn’t get why I was that club’s president!

“This place holds a lot of equipment specialized for studying magic of all fields. These kinds of facilities aren’t common, even in the Duchy.”

It seemed like that place was on a different level from the dormitory’s magic lab. Seeing that everyone had such positive reactions, I guessed that it was something insanely good.

“Well, I guess this place is decent.”

“Be more sincere!”

“Haha! It’s soo amazing!”

“I’m getting angry!”

It seemed like she was in a great mood, but seeing my dull and bored expression seemed to send her fuming. No, I mean, what did she expect after she basically forced me to give some sort of reaction in that situation?

It was like she kept asking me “Isn’t this fun? It’s fun, isn’t it?”, while we were watching a movie that I absolutely didn’t like.

It was like a garbage movie full of jumpscares!

After everyone was done looking around, they sat down at the round table in the main hall.

And I was actually the president of those guys.

It was a strange picture no matter how much I thought about it.

The president was the least qualified person for the job, and yet all of those talented people were still only looking at me. It felt like I was the leader of some heretical cult.

They would do the research, so I had to be in charge of coordinating human affairs.

All of them seemed to get along well with each other at first glance, but they were actually just looking at me, as I was their only connection.

In particular, Redina, the little senior, looked at me anxiously.

While she did ask the others questions going, “Junior, Junior.” I was still the person she was most comfortable with.

“Let’s skip the boring opening speeches and procedures and whatever. I don’t have a fucking clue how to do them, and I don’t want to, either.”

The first gathering of the Magic Research Society.

Started that day.

"Anyway, this isn’t some club room, but a whole club house, so if you have the permission of the superintendent, you can stay over in this place on weekdays as well as weekends.”

I only stayed in the main hall, but I knew what that mansion contained because Mr. Epinhauser had informed me about it prior to that.

Separated labs and equipment enabling one to research almost every field of magic.

…And a bedroom.

The existence of that bedroom made me feel an eerie sort of fear.

That was originally a professor’s lab.

However, maybe it wasn’t the professor who slept in there, but the student assistants…

“Really?”

“Then does that mean we don’t have to go to bed at the usual time?”

“…As the superintendent won't come around here, I guess.”

When they heard that they could research all through the night, their expressions brightened considerably.

Harriet and Adeila seemed especially pleased.

I was going to tell them that if they got caught playing outside after they got permission to spend the night there they would get in trouble, but it seemed like that wasn’t necessary.

Those guys loved magic to the point that nothing else filled their brains, apparently.

“The club advisor is supposed to be Mr. Mustrang. So if you don’t know how to use some of the research facilities properly or you want to do some dangerous research, you’ll have to observe first or get permission from him.”

The Magic Research Society wasn’t a general club, so the club advisor had to be a wizard.

And Mr. Mustrang happened to be one.

* * *

So, that guy, who never had this kind of role in the original, became the club advisor of the Magic Research Society.

I heard he’d actually volunteered to take that position.

Both students of Class A and B with magic majors gathered in that club to do magic research, so he’d stepped up.

However, to be honest, I didn’t like Mr. Mustrang all that much.

Well…

No matter how one thought about it, I was a pretty weird guy, wasn't I?

With how positively I portrayed Mr. Mustrang and Ludwig, for me to not like them after I met them in real life was pretty unbelievable.

I didn't like those guys filled to the brim with positive energy. Instead, I liked Mr. Epinhauser.

'Oh sure, do it or don't, it's your life. You are responsible for your actions, after all.'

I liked those kinds of people.

Mr. Mustrang was extremely compassionate and thought too much about his students to the point that he would definitely interfere in what they did in one way or another.

The club advisor was just that, a teacher who was supposed to give us advice, so he didn't actually have to show up.

However, taking Mr.Mustrang's personality into consideration, I knew he was certain to come around often.

Unfortunately, Mr. Epinhauser was unable to become our club advisor, as he wasn't a wizard. Ultimately, that wasn't enough to whine and complain about, but it was still rather regrettable, having Mr. Mustrang as our club advisor.

Still, since he was a good person by nature, he wouldn't pose that much of a hindrance.

I went around to take a look at that club mansion so that, later, when we held a formal club meeting, Mr. Mustrang would be present as well.

"Formal meetings will take place once a week, but the facilities are pretty well kept, so it doesn't really matter if you come around any time you want. The place is protected by a magic lock, so you won't be able to get in unless you're registered. We don't have to worry about robberies and such because of that, but still, try not to leave anything valuable in here."

Well…

I felt like I was talking more like a teacher than the club president. Everyone was looking at me like that at least, nodding their heads at my words.

Ah.

All of them were acting pretty cute.

They were so cute I just wanted to eat them up.

I could just bite them to death. Why was I acting like that?

“Anyway, that’s all the information I got from the teachers…”

Of course, since I had been made club president, I had my own thoughts as well.

I didn’t know how to use magic. So whether it was research or holding lectures, it would be them who would do that.

"Louis, how are the preparations for your lectures going?”

“I don’t know if it’ll go well, but, well, I’m preparing for them.”

My role as the president was just organizing everything.

Louis was studying and preparing even before our club activities and had started to improve his skills. He was studying separately from his preparations for exams or grades—he showed great enthusiasm to become a magician who could teach wizards.

“Great. You can hold them whenever you’re ready.”

“Alright.”

Because I held the title of club president, they treated me differently than they used to. In the past, that guy would have only listened to my words because he was scared of me, but then he listened to me because I was the president.

Good.

Louis was preparing for his lectures. He might even be able to start right away, but it

would have been rather awkward if I made him do it right that instant.

“I can’t really help you with your research, but there are some things I want you guys to look into. Can I tell you?”

All of them looked a little suspicious at that sudden remark but still nodded. I was surprisingly nice, being the president, wasn’t it?

Even if I couldn’t participate in their research, I could give them some research topics and goals to work towards. Originally, there were six members, including me, in that club, but as the senior Redina joined, we then had seven.

The Gate incident…

It would be best if we were able to make sure that plot point wouldn’t happen.

The core element of the Gate incident were the warp gates, which connected a different world to this plane.

However, if we weren’t able to stop it, we had to fight. To do that, everyone had to become stronger.

Therefore, the results they had to produce should lead to their improvement.

The improvement of their combat capabilities, to be precise.

So I was going to give each of them an individual research topic to improve their practical skills.

"First, senior."

"Huh? Me?”

The first one was Redina.

When I suddenly called out her name, she tilted her head.

“You’re mana pool is still miniscule, right?”

"That’s mean!”

“It’s true, though.”

“Damn it! I hate you! I knew it! You’re the worst!”

Redina snapped at my words, but because I only said the truth, she kind of looked like she was about to cry.

Her talent was No Cast.

It was one hell of a cheat she had there, but she also had an extreme weakness—her mana pool was extremely small. When I looked at her physical data, it turned out that her magical power wasn’t just low, but really low.

Magical Power: 4.2

It was only at F+ Rank. That was very, very low compared to her classmates.

I was at 13, making it C+ Rank. She had half of my magical power.

Mana Sensitivity was very important for the growth of one’s magical power.

It seemed like it had been judged that her mana sensitivity was very low or inadequate. It was even lower than Cayer’s, who didn’t have Mana Control.

If one had to give up either Mana Sensitivity or Mana Control, it would be less advantageous to give up Mana Sensitivity. Although Cayer was blessed with a gigantic mana pool, he was unable to control that magical power, so even though he had a lot of magical power, he had no way to use it.

Anyway, Redina lacked something different from Cayer.

Even if we did something at that point, her natural growth rate wouldn’t change much.

We would soon take some measures to enhance all of their magical power, but Redina’s problem was unlikely to get solved by that.

As such, we needed another alternative.

"Senior, don’t use your own magical power for now.”

“…Huh?”

Everyone stared at me and tilted their heads as if they didn’t know what I was talking about.

“Is there any law that says that you have to use your own magical power to activate magic? If you extract the magical power stored in a mana stone to activate a spell, is that not magic?”

“Huuh?”

“What?”

“?”

Everyone seemed shocked by my radical idea. “No, He’s just someone completely ignorant of magic. Is that why he’s able to talk such bullshit?” That was what they seemed to think.

However, there was one person who seemed to know what I was talking about.

“Are you talking about Stone Magic?"

Harriet de Saint-Owan…

I could only trust in our little idiot.

As expected, she was the best!

CHAPTER 221

Stone Magic…

It was a spell activation method that used the extracted magical power stored in mana stones. Although I didn't actually know much about magic itself, there were some things I couldn't help but know, as I created this world.

Of course, if one couldn't control magical power, one couldn't use Stone Magic either, so that didn't mean that Louis could become a wizard using that method.

Most of them seemed to have never heard the term 'Stone Magic' before.

"I don't really know what that Stone Magic you talk about is. I just thought that you might be able to do something like that."

By asking things like "Can't you do something like that?" I hoped that someone would say "Yeah, there is." and Harriet answered accurately.

She looked perplexed.

"But that would be extremely difficult to do… To the point that it's like having to learn magic from scratch. While it's possible, it's so difficult to do that no one uses that method."

Yeah. I know because I set it up like that.

Stone Magic entailed controlling external magical power, so casting spells in that way was completely different from using one's own magical power.

So while the system existed, it had been completely buried.

However, I wasn't recommending Redina to that completely different magic system called Stone Magic.

"Then we just have to find a mana stone with which one could use external magical power like one's own."

“…You keep talking as if that’s easy.”

Yeah, my words were rather weird and impossible.

But what could I do? I knew that something like that would appear in the future.

Harriet seemed to think that I was talking utter nonsense after all, and Redina looked like she was annoyed when she heard that she would have to learn a new magic system because of her small and empty mana pool.

Oh, come on.

Fine, you don’t have to listen to me if you don’t want to!

But not only am I an adult, I’m also God!

I’m right!

“Adelia."

“…Huh? Yes? Me?"

“Yeah.”

Adelia looked at me with glazed eyes as I suddenly called out to her.

"If it doesn’t work, make it work.”

Adelia…

That girl would later create such mana stones, or to be precise, an artifact that was able to do that.

A powerful artifact that could store magical power and made it possible for one to use external magical power like the power present in one’s own body.

I knew that she would develop something like that, in fact, she would even call it a Power Cartridge.

The Gate Crisis would start in the first semester of our third year, inevitably

throwing the kids into battle. Of course, after the initial chaos caused by the start of the battle passed like a typhoon, the Temple students would come out to earnestly support the ones fighting.

However, the Royal Class would also get divided into combat and non-combat units. After all, there were some students among them who simply couldn't fight.

It couldn't be helped because you couldn't just throw students whose talent had nothing to do with combat into battle.

But they also had their own roles and duties to take care of.

For example, Louis taught the other students majoring in magic how to use their spells properly in his spare time.

Adelia was part of the non-combat unit because, while she had a talent in Summoning Magic, she also had another one—Magic Crafting.

The students that majored in magic always suffered from constant magic power exhaustion because almost all the battles they had to fight in were long, drawn out ones. They were only 19 at most. Except for some special cases, they couldn't help but constantly hit the limit of their magical power before the limits of their talents.

It wasn't just a problem among Royal Class students, but all wizards who participated in the battles.

Magic was a powerful weapon, but it couldn't be constantly used.

However, those battles couldn't be avoided.

So as Adelia witnessed that situation on the battlefield, she'd struggled to come up with a solution for that problem

She'd built an artifact which could make use of the magical power stored in mana stones and enable someone to use that power like one's own.

A Power Cartridge.

It was different from Stone Magic which Harriet mentioned, but its goal was similar.

What Adelia created was a cheat item similar to a magical power amplifier, and I was telling her to develop it earlier.

'If it doesn't work, make it work.'

After hearing those words, Adelia's face turned sickly pale.

"Uhm, I… I don't know what you mean. Make it work…?"

Although she was the one who would end up developing something like that, she was contemplating if that kind of nonsense was even possible. Harriet was also glaring at me, burning anger in her eyes.

"If she could quickly make something like that just because you told her to, Adelia would end up going down in the history of the whole magic world. How is that making any sense?"

Yeah. She would actually go down in history, after all.

Still, just going by my words, she was reacting as if an outsider who only knew how to dream big asked something impossible from them, the others didn't seem much different. All of them had luke-warm expressions on their faces as if they didn't have any idea what I was talking about.

"That's right. So you think that my mana pool will be like this for my whole life! You're so mean!"

Redina shouted so hard that she almost fell over. She even teared up.

No, I was doing all this to make you stronger, okay?

I'm God!

I'm right!

I couldn't really convince her with just that.

"Ah, fuck's sake."

Eventually, I furrowed my brows, looking at the others with a rather sullen

expression on my face.

“You seem to think that I’m easy these days, huh? You punks.”

Ultimately, I had no other choice but to pick the easiest and fastest method.

—I had to take a step back.

Did you forget that I’m “That Reinhardt”? Do you think it’s funny seeing me walking around with crutches after I fought with a fourth-year?

You want me to show you how funny I can get?

When I suddenly started to act crazy again, all of their faces grew pale.

"You guys so desperately wanted me to be the president to the point of forcing me into the position, so just do what I’m telling you to do, you bastards. Don’t fucking dare to question whether I’m right or wrong. Hey! Adelia!”

“Y-Yes! Yes!” Adelia replied, her complexion growing paler and paler.

“If I tell you to make something, you make it. Even if you have to flip the world upside down to do it.”

“Erm, Y-yes…”

“Is that how you reply?”

“Yes! I’ll definitely create it!””

“Good. That’s how it should be.”

I looked at Adelia, who answered me loud and clearly, her face deathly pale, with a satisfied expression on my face.

As they made me president that day, it was their duty to roll around the club if I told them to.

In the end, faced with my coercion, the pale Adelia nodded wildly, and the others, Harriet included, just looked at me in shock.

However, no one could say anything to me.

—Because that was the kind of person I was.

I then muttered something, my arms crossed.

“Can’t do it, huh? You’re saying that you can’t do it without even having tried, idiots. Hah. Tsk. Kids these days don’t know what it means to be persistent anymore.”

I didn’t forget to spout some more nonsense.

They didn’t have to worry about me making them make something completely impossible.

Having ordered her in such a way, Adelia seemed to be terrified of what terrible thing I might do to her if she didn’t manage to make what I’d ordered her to.

* * *

She would start developing that artifact feeling that she would die if she was unable to make it.

“And Redina will help Adelia with her research. She’s making it for you, after all.”

"M-me too…?"

Redina wore a shocked expression as she opened her mouth.

“Wow, were you planning on freeloading? You have to contribute at least.”

“Do you really think I can make something like that?”

"Stop objecting and help.”

I made Redina Adelia’s research assistant, not accepting any objections.

"Next up is Christina."

“M-me?"

“Yeah, you.”

All of them seemed to have gotten pretty comfortable with me, but when I suddenly acted the way I did, they finally realized who I actually was, their expressions turning bewildered.

Christina, who had a talent in Alchemy and Enchantment—another member of the non-combat unit.

“You have to help me directly.”

“What do you mean by ‘helping you…?’"

I gave the excuse of Redina’s lack of magical power for Adelia’s research, so there was another good excuse I came up with.

“As you can see, I tried to use Magic Body Strengthening, albeit clumsily.”

The side effects of Magic Body Strengthening.

“Make something like a drug that can make the body more sensitive to magical power or something that makes it easier to control magical power.”

The others’ expressions sure were a sight to behold after I said some more nonsense comparable to a nuclear bomb.

Seriously, you punks.

You are going to make these things later! It might not make any sense to you now, but you’ll really make these things later!

The Gate Crisis was in the first semester of our third year.

There were many who wouldn’t realize how to strengthen themselves with magical power even until their graduation.

I’d actually only planned out the story until the second year, so I didn’t really have anything more to write after that, that was why I just threw in that Gate Incident and called it a day.

Faced with that disaster, they would even make Temple students participate in the battles, but when I thought about it a bit more, while the kids were excellent, they were far from the best the Empire had to offer.

At that point, only Ellen, Bertus, and Ludwig would be able to use Magic Body Strengthening.

The rest of the combat major students wouldn't, so when they were thrown into battle, they had to quickly realize how to use it.

That was why Christina would develop a special drug with which everyone could quickly adapt and be able to use Magic Body Strengthening.

Its name was Moonshine.

I thought it was just a popular term for moonlight… Later on, someone in the comments explained that Moonshine didn't actually refer to moonlight, but illegally produced liquor, which made me feel really ashamed…

Anyway, I could just name it something else after Christina made it again.

It wasn't just a drug that helped one realize how to use Magic Body Strengthening, it also helped one familiarize oneself to it. In fact, it also helped increase one's magical power.

Harriet eventually lost her patience.

"You only just tell us to 'do this, make that.' Why do you only want things made that would go down in the history of the magic world even if one managed to only do one of these things? If you were going to ask us to develop such incredible things, you should have gone to the Temple Graduate Center of Research, or the magic tower, not here!"

Harriet was right. I'd ordered them to develop two items that would resound throughout the whole world at once.

It was crazy to ask members of a high school club, not a graduate lab, to create such things. It was beyond crazy.

Graduate lab? If they would be able to make things like that, I wouldn't have made

the club. I would have just gone there and commissioned them to make it. Why would I ever do something like make the club if I could just do that?

However, those guys were the only ones in this whole world who would be able to do it. I didn't even know if the members of the graduate lab would listen to my ideas, and even if they listened to me, that didn't mean they could actually develop those items!

I couldn't convince those high school club guys that they were the only ones who could create things like that.

So, in the end, the only solution was coercion.

"Idiot. Do I have to say the same again? Anyway, as long as we are in this club, I'm the king."

"D-don't call me an idiot!"

When I called Harriet "Idiot" in front of the Class B guys, her face turned red from embarrassment and anger.

"Anyway, make it."

"I-I'll try, but I don't know if it'll work…"

Christina nodded her head gently as if she was trying not to annoy me any further.

I had one more thing to tell her, though.

"And I have another question."

"What?"

"Why do you only enchant objects?"

I was trying to give her some practical tips that she could apply immediately. "Why could only objects be enchanted?" I was basically questioning that common sense.

"Why don't you try enchanting things like potions?"

“…Uhm?”

All of them looked slightly surprised at my completely different and new approach.

"Well… I think I might manage to do something like that, but would that be… actually useful?”

That preconceived notion that only objects could be enchanted would get broken later on.

Moonshine was a product of adding elements of enchantment to the formulation of the drug.

—An enchanted potion.

It seemed like everyone was thinking about that new concept, however, that time, their eyes seemed to glitter at the thought.

“Anyway. I’ll think more about this.”

“Good.”

Power Cartridges for the students majoring in magic…

Moonshine for the combat major students…

That would be the start of the development of these two powerful items. If they managed to complete them, both the combat and magic major students would get even stronger.

Louis was preparing for his lectures, so there was nothing I could give him.

Then there was our Grand Duchy’s idiot, who could do anything and everything.

And Anna de Gerna, the one talented in Black Magic.

In Anna de Gerna’s case, she wouldn’t make anything special. She would take the role of a combatant who used her Black Magic directly in battle.

So I decided to take care of the people who needed improvement first.

Next, I looked at Harriet.

“Now that I think of it, you’re the best among us here, right?”

“…Th-the best?”

“In terms of talent, you’re top class.”

Even in that place where monsters with tremendous talents gathered, the one who stood above them was the one holding the simple and straightforward talent called “Magic”.

In the original, Harriet de Saint-Owan, who was temperamental and arrogant, was still the one with the best talent in the end.

She had become just a cute girl. When I looked at her, it seemed like she felt like she would be in big trouble. I just couldn’t help myself.

I really didn’t know she would end up becoming that cute.

Harriet’s expression changed rapidly when I said that she actually was top class among all the students majoring in magic.

"Wh-what are you saying…? You just called me an idiot, and now you’re praising me… Just decide on one thing…”

She got really shy and twiddled her fingers.

No, why was she acting like that?

I don’t know about any other time, but then wasn’t the right time for her to act like that, right?

"So, you can do anything, right?”

“!!!!”

Only then did Harriet’s expression turn tense, her mouth wide open.

I’d just ordered two students with talents for Alchemy and Magic Crafting to make

ridiculous magic items that would go down in human history.

It seemed like she couldn't even imagine what ridiculous thing I would request of her, who was talented in all fields of magic, to make.

She seemed convinced that I would make her do something absurd.

Unfortunately, Harriet never invented anything special or innovative in the original story.

She merely acted as a battle mage of the combat unit who swept away the enemies with her overwhelming magic.

Harriet de Saint-Owan, supplemented with Power Cartridges, was literally a monster that could be called a mass-destruction weapon. Of course, that was the reason why she became even more stuck-up and arrogant.

Anyway, it was fine for the moment because she was cute.

I would ask Harriet to do something she never did in the original.

Most of the things I had made them do so far were things to prepare for "When the gates burst open."

I would have her do something completely different.

"How about studying Dimensional Magic?"

"Huuh?"

'Getting rid of the Gate Incident itself'

—That was what I ordered Harriet to do.

CHAPTER 222

"…Dimensional Magic?"

Harriet only seemed a bit confused, not displeased. I'd told the others to make incredible items, but then I'd suddenly told her to research something as impractical as Dimensional Magic.

She had no idea what my purpose or reason for that choice was.

"Why all of a sudden?"

"Isn't Dimensional Magic the highest ranked among all magics known to man?"

Dimensional Magic…

That was when Louis Ankton interjected.

"Actually, rather than it being a field in itself, the concept of dimensions is dealt with in small parts in various fields of magic. Spatial Magic and Summoning mMagic have a lot to do with dimensions, after all."

Harriet nodded at that.

"And you should know that these spells are usually very high-ranking spells, right? Just think of magic that lets one teleport through space, the concept behind warp gates, or Summoning Magic that could open portals to another world."

Most of the magic involving dimensions was super high-ranking.

"So, there is no field of magic that exclusively deals with dimensions itself."

"Really?"

"Yes."

There were some fields of magic that had something to do with dimensions, but

there actually wasn't a field called Dimensional Magic yet.

"We can just make it, then."

I looked into Harriet's eyes.

If it doesn't work, make it work.

If it doesn't exist, just make it.

"You're a genius, after all."

"H-huuh?"

"You can do it. Idiot."

"H-how could you give the most difficult task to someone you call an idiot?!"

"That's just how much I trust you."

Harriet's face, which was about to turn red at my words, seemed to have gone red because of a different reason. Her lips were trembling.

"You can do it, right?"

"Y-y-yes… I-I'll try… I'll do it."

She nodded subtly at my words while cold sweat ran down her face.

Dimensional Magic research…

I also had no idea what might come from that, so I also had no way of knowing what outcome Harriet might reach.

"S-so… Why Dimensional Magic…? Just because you think I might be able to do something like that if I tried?" She asked, her face flushed.

I honestly had no good excuse prepared for that decision.

"I want to go to another world."

“Huuuuh?”

So, for the moment, I just uttered some complete bullshit.

Everyone’s brains seemed to have frozen over at my novel, nonsensical bullshit.

* * *

The Gate Incident…

Warp gates connecting to another world.

My first plan was to destroy all of the warp gates across the entire continent. However, there was a possibility that it would still happen.

The next step was to develop powerful magic items before they were supposed to appear to improve the others’ and my individual combat abilities. Of course, if the incident did end up happening, it wouldn’t be enough to just supply the Royal Class with them. We might have to supply all of Temple and even the whole continent.

There was also a possibility that the over-accumulation of power would cause other problems, but I had yet to reach an answer to that question.

If it really ended up causing problems, we could just secretly use them only inside of Temple or in the Royal Class, and if Harriet actually succeeded in her research on the field of Dimensional Magic, the incident might never happen in the first place.

As long as this world was destined to be connected to another world in the future, it meant that there surely existed other worlds, even as we spoke.

So, rather than waiting until the invasion happened, we might as well invade the other world first.

To conclude, I had three requests:

The creation of Power Cartridges.

The development of Moonshine.

And the research of Dimensional Magic.

In exchange for making me their president, those guys had to listen to every one of my ridiculous orders.

Of course, rather than listening to me because I was the president, they had just realized again that I was a crazy bastard and went along with what I said because they were scared of what I would do if they didn't.

Anyway, those guys couldn't just use the lab during club meetings, so it seemed like they would use it as a magic lab dedicated to the first-years. The equipment there seemed to be much better than the dormitory lab's or their private ones.

Now, with that, it was ensured that the magic major students could research smoothly on their own.

After Moonshine was developed, I'd make rapid progress in Magic Body Strengthening.

If Ellen were to use it as well, wouldn't she rise to the level of Sword Master within the next year?

Anyway, I was exhausted from walking around with that aching body of mine.

Those who wanted to stay there could stay, those who wanted to go back could go back.

Harriet and I were the only ones who went back right away. I felt like she was following me while pretending that she wasn't because she still seemed worried about me, who still had to use crutches.

"Do you really think there are other worlds like that?"

Harriet was still dumbfoundead by my desire to go to a different world.

Regardless of whether I did or didn't, from my point of view, this place was a different world already.

"That's exactly what I want to find out."

"Then why do you want to do that?"

“Just because? I’m curious.”

I had no excuse other than something as vague as that.

“You’re really such a weird person. I’m also curious, but I really don’t like how you just order others to do things.”

“Well, then you shouldn’t have made me president.”

“Seriously! I really regret making you the president!”

Harriet intended to tease me with that but seemed to regret it a lot as it blew up in her face. She folded her arms and pouted because she had to research Dimensional Magic, a field that didn’t even exist yet.

“Anyway, since it’s something you ordered, I’ll call you whenever I need you.”

“What could I even do to help you?”

“I don’t know! Anyway, I’ll just call you! You do whatever you want, so I’ll do the same!”

That girl…

Did she think she just had the right to call me whenever she wanted? No, when I thought about it, didn’t she seem to gradually come to like the idea of her research topic more and more?

“Right! Then I should go visit the warp gates on the weekend!”

“Why the warp gates all of a sudden?”

“While there is no field in magic called Dimensional Magic, wouldn't it help your research if you studied warp gates, which are like permanently open dimensional doors? You’ll come with me.”

Harriet looked at me, a smirk on her lips.

Don’t lie! You just want to play around!

“Can’t you see these crutches right now?”

“Ah, right…”

It was only then that she realized that she was just trying to drag an injured person around on the weekend.

No…

I was just teasing her for acting like an idiot.

At times like those, she really did look like a real idiot.

That was why she was cute.

“Hey, if you feel sorry, give me a piggyback ride. I feel tired.”

“Wha-whaaaat?! Wha-whawha-what-what are you talking about!”

“Anyway, carry me on your back. Oh, young lady of the Grand Duchy. Please, carry this humble beggar on your back.”

“Th-this! This guy! You! You! Why is it you, not me, who brings up my identity now? Are you actually crazy?!”

Harriet blew her top at my absurd remarks and eventually tried to give me an actual piggyback ride.

In Ellen’s case, she simply lifted me up, however, that time was different—she seemed to be a lot more flustered as well.

But in the end, she didn’t even have enough strength to stand up with me.

“You’re so weak, young lady. You can’t even carry this humble one’s body.”

“Iiiirk, seriously! I really hate you! You! I seriously hate you! Really!”

At my words, Harriet eventually burst out in a roar.

* * *

The battle between the Royal Class and the Orbis Class during the festival had gone up in smoke.

—And so had the challenges associated with it.

Things I never actually considered doing anyway disappeared, so that was good. That way, the others would have a lot more time as well. The Magic Research Society would be able start their activities full-throttle.

By the way, the entire Orbis Class shutting down… I asked myself if that would really happen.

I didn't want things to go that far.

Although I would soon be able to ditch the crutches, my physical condition was still shit. It was completely impossible for me to train.

I couldn't do my early morning training with Adriana nor could I do any joint training sessions with Ellen.

Just because I hurt a bit. While I knew that I didn't just uselessly let time pass, I still felt like I was about to go crazy.

"Are you still in pain?"

"I have already recovered from the incredibly painful stage. I have now reached the going crazy stage."

"…"

It was night time.

I guessed that she'd just finished training, however, she had already washed up and dried herself.

Ellen would always ask me if I was still in pain when she ran into me.

Ellen gave me a bewildered look after hearing me say that I felt like I was going crazy, though it wasn't enough to kill me

She looked slightly grumpy.

I had been out of commission for quite a long period of time by then.

I hadn't been to the training room for quite a while, either.

Was that the reason?

"…Are you mad?"

"…No."

Ellen shook her head, immediately answering.

"It's not your fault that you're in pain."

Ellen spoke without looking at me, leaning against a window.

"Still, if you ever get hurt like this again in the future…"

"…"

"I'm going to be really, really mad."

Ellen hadn't actually gotten mad at me in the end.

While it felt terrifying, there was another strange feeling bubbling up.

"Well, though I didn't exercise, I haven't eaten anything yet."

"…?"

"Let's eat something. I'll go make something."

While I couldn't use my body that well yet, I was confident that my condition had gotten good enough that I could handle a knife.

"No."

Ellen shook her head.

“I’ll make you something.”

As expected, being sick really made me feel like a king.

“Are you going to feed me as well?”

“…You don’t need me to do that anymore.”

Ellen stared at me as if she wanted to say that I shouldn’t cross the line.

* * *

Ellen sat down in front of Reinhardt, who was eating the cream risotto she had made. She did the same.

She was thinking about holding back a little while cooking, but she’d ended up doing her best instead. He was a patient, after all.

It tasted very, very good. She had to cook with the ingredients she could find in Temple, which were nothing but first-grade, and Ellen was also very skilled, so it wasn’t easy for her to cook badly on purpose.

“You can do it all now, huh?”

She thought that Reinhardt would feel disappointed or sad if he found out that she could cook better than him, but she seemed to have been mistaken. Reinhardt only said that he was glad now that there was one less annoying thing for him to do.

"I’m only doing this until you get better.”

Ellen, of course, emphasized that it was an exception and that she wouldn’t cook again later on. Reinhardt simply nodded, saying that there was no need to make such a big fuss about it.

Reinhardt’s injury was much worse than her own had been, so he didn’t heal as quickly as her.

However, even though he should’ve quietly rested and waited for his body to recover, he still kept wandering around here and there. Would it hurt him more to just stand still?

“What about the Magic Research Society?”

“Oh, I went there today. I was good. Looks like we’ve gotten a whole lab, not just a room.”

The Magic Research Society…

When Ellen had heard that Reinhardt was going to be the president of the Magic Research Society, she’d really doubted her own ears.

Why magic so suddenly? How did that make sense?

However, when she found out more details, she thought it might actually be quite plausible.

Reinhardt had only made that suggestion because he thought it would be good if the magic major students gathered and did some magic research together. He hadn’t meant to become a member.

But he didn’t just become a member of that club, he actually became its president.

Ellen thought that it might have been because of Harriet.

She couldn’t help but think that way after she saw Harriet de Saint-Owan’s expression—she’d looked so happy when she talked about the Magic Research Society while standing next to Reinhardt.

Harriet liked Reinhardt, Ellen knew that.

However, Harriet, who majored in magic, other assisting abilities, and combat magic, rarely had any overlap with Reinhardt during class or in their daily lives.

He practically lived in the training hall, after all.

There weren’t many occasions for her to see Reinhardt. Maybe that was the reason why she brought him into the club. Ellen felt like she’d gotten a rough idea of what’d happened.

However, Reinhardt had actually taken on the role of the Magic Research Society’s president, which was of no use to him.

What was the meaning of that?

“Yawn… Now that I’vr eaten, I feel pretty tired.”

Ellen frowned as she glanced at Reinhardt eating the risotto.

He had to have been busy with his own affairs, but he’d still taken care of the magic major students and even taken over the role of club president.

What was the reason for that? He was in so much pain that he could only barely move around with crutches, but he was still working so diligently.

—Not for himself, but for someone else.

For Harriet.

That might only mean one thing. Reinhardt…

Towards Harriet de Saint-Owan.

“Hey, what’s up with that expression?”

“…What?

“Why do you look so desperate? Is someone going to die?”

Ellen didn’t know what expression she was wearing.

What expression was she making?

Ellen really couldn’t tell.

"I’m not eating this slowly because it’s not tasty, it’s just hard to move my jaw.”

Reinhardt was slowly nibbling at his food with a spoon, so, thinking that Ellen was put in a bad mood because of that, he said something like that.

Reinhardt didn’t go to the training hall those days because he couldn’t.

She knew that.

He would come back to the training room again, wield his training sword, bicker with her all day and whining after he got better

However…

Ellen felt anxious that something that'd never actually belonged to her would get taken away from her.

He didn't belong to her, so he couldn't be stolen from her either.

She had no reason to think that way.

However, Ellen couldn't stop her thoughts from unconsciously wandering in that kind of direction.

Ellen ended up leaving more than half of the risotto on her plate.

* * *

It was such a relief that I could take classes again, although I couldn't attend practice-oriented classes at all.

However, I still got to observe the newly assigned Magic Body Strengthening Class with Ellen.

Rather than using my own magical power, though, all I got was something similar to a Ki Therapy from the yoga master. Should I call it refreshing? I could feel a certain type of energy flowing and swaying through my whole body.

I roughly guessed that it would feel like that if one properly used Magic Body Strengthening.

I felt like I might end up failing the midterm exams at that rate. I didn't really have any attachments towards my grades, but I didn't want to end up flunking.

Of course, there was also the possibility of some people trying to do something to me while I was that weak.

But it somehow seemed like everything had gotten resolved already.

There were four people who hated me:

The three idiot brothers and Heinrich.

Heinrich's hatred for me seemed to have reduced a bit after we'd gone to the Edina Islands. We weren't close friends or anything like that, but he didn't openly show any contempt for me or actively try to avoid me anymore.

And regardless of the outcome, I'd fought for the sake of Erich's and the arrogant brother's revenge and got seriously injured in the process. They still seemed to be afraid of me, but they didn't seem to hate me.

I'd somehow managed to sort things out with those whom I had been on bad terms with to some extent.

Rather than hatred for me, the only feeling they had left for me was fear. While that wasn't all that good either, it meant that there wouldn't be any accidents, at least.

Ultimately, I still couldn't focus on my training, even if I wanted to, because of my injury, so I paid more attention to work involving the Magic Research Society than staying in the training room.

Of course, I couldn't actually help with their research itself.

All I could do was take care of things as the club president.

The budget, for example…

"So you want me to triple your current budget?"

"Yes."

"…Your current budget is 5,000 gold coins. You know that this is an unusually high amount, right?"

I was attending the Royal Class club meeting at that moment.

CHAPTER 223

As a club president, I had to attend those small events.

There were a total of 120 people in Royal Class. Because the amount of students was low, the number of clubs wasn't that large either.

Attending the club meeting were the Royal Class Student Council President Ceres van Owan and the Vice President.

Oliva Lanze, the club president of 'Grace', was also there.

Also, Layton Zabry, the president of "Monthly Royal Class", who'd caused a certain incident and gotten severely scolded by Charlotte for it.

Then there were five more seniors who seemed to be the presidents of other clubs.

That made me realize that the size of the Royal Class was certainly small. However, there was still a lot of budget meant to support clubs left, and since a club with such a huge focus like the Magic Research Research Society had been created by us, we received quite the budget as well.

Magic research was bound to cost a lot of money.

Five thousand gold coins…

Five billion won…

That was far too much for a high school club's budget. Other clubs didn't really need that much money to spend, so they didn't take much.

However, magic research was rather special in many ways. For one, it was like a money-eating black hole

But it was only natural for the president's expression to twist when I asked her to triple our club's budget.

"What's the problem? It's not like they'll use it to play around, they need it to study, so if you still have some left, then it should be given to them~"

Olivia Lanze, who was overwhelmingly on my side, simply smiled softly as she looked at Ceres.

Ah, she was usually a bit silly, but she was definitely on my side at times like those.

-……

Of course, those who seemed rather dissatisfied with Olivia's tremendous affection towards me looked like they were just put in a bad mood by her words.

Was it really such a good thing that she was on my side…?

Who are you? Who the hell do you think you are?

I really didn't know what to do when people looked at me as if they were asking, "Who are you? Who the hell do you think you are?" It wasn't like they were saying anything to me directly.

Of course, the student council president couldn't do anything but sigh.

"Reinhardt, there are limits to everything, even the Royal Class. I allocated the highest budget to your club that I could. Did you know that a faculty meeting was held over that? Not just on the student council level."

"…You did?"

"Of course. It wasn't easy to provide adequate facilities and research funds. Well, if you were in a Graduate school club or a club with a lot of achievements, it wouldn't be so impossible to get an additional budget, but you are neither."

At my reckless request, Ceres provided me with a calm explanation.

"I know that there were a lot of participants of the faculty meeting who had quite the negative opinion about all this as well. Still, Mr. Epinhauser and Mr. Mustrang strongly insisted on it, which is why you were allowed to receive so much support."

That was another thing I didn't know.

Those two first-year teachers were so enthusiastic about giving us as much support as possible, so it seemed things turned out the way they did because of that.

I couldn't imagine that Mr. Epinhauser had actually voiced his enthusiasm like that.

"Of course, I know that magic research requires an uncountable amount of money as long as you are set on doing it, but the only thing I can tell you is that the support you received is already considerable, Reinhardt. Asking me to triple it is basically impossible."

"Ah, Why~ We're a special class, special class. They should just do whatever we ask them to do~"

"Senior, please be quiet for a bit."

Ceres, who didn't really care about what she said, glared at Olivia Lanze in my stead, to which she flinched.

That girl only ever got scared when someone got serious. No, but even though I didn't actually look up her physical data, it seemed like that she not only was talented in her use of divine powers but also had wide knowledge of close combat as well.

I did think that it was true that she was good at fighting, and yet she was such a coward.

It wasn't like I simply wanted to cause trouble by suddenly asking for an increase in the amount of support we received in a club meeting where my only job should have been to simply show my face.

'Money.'

'Get some money.'

It was because Harriet had issued that strict order.

The three things I'd ordered them to develop were, of course, impossible to even start to research without anything.

Dimensional Magic was a high-ranked type of magic that wasn't actually a field of

magic yet, and as for the Power Cartridges, we had to gather various types of mana stones to research them properly, and Moonshine also needed numerous reagents to experiment properly.

It was unclear at that point whether they would be able to succeed or not, but their research was sure to consume a lot of money.

I mean, no matter how much money we had, it would never be enough, so Harriet had ordered me to get us more money if I wanted them to develop such ridiculous things.

Damn it.

Why did that feel so much like a wife begging her husband to raise more money for their starving kids cowering in the corner of their home?

Harriet wasn't my wife, and the wizard students weren't my kids! But why did that situation feel like it?

Anyway, Harriet had told me to "Go and get money!" so I went to that place to do something about it.

I was originally going to go and ask Harriet, who had a lot of money, why she didn't just use her own money for the club.

But then I thought that that would very much cross the line.

So, anyway.

I was in the middle of getting some more money.

I didn't just simply go to that rigorous place for the sake of it—it was where they did the budgeting. It was actually true that we had already received a huge budget for our activities, but it was more than clear that it would be insufficient in the end.

That sure was weird.

If it was my money, I'd just say "Oh, that's great!" and that would be the end.

As I simply received that money from other people under the name of receiving a

budget, it simply didn't really feel like my own money, and it actually wasn't just my money, either.

That was why it seemed not sufficient enough.

Ceres had told me that it was practically impossible for her to provide any more support at that point.

"Is it really impossible? Can you really not do anything about this?"

"I want to give you more, but I simply can't. That's it, Reinhardt."

Ceres seemed troubled by my stubbornness.

"Ceres, this isn't the only place from where one can get money, right?"

"…What?"

Olivia Lanze tilted her head and pointed to some place. I didn't know what she was pointing at.

"Oh, maybe… the Temple Student Council?"

"Yes."

Olivia smiled brightly.

"If we got some money from them, wouldn't it be possible to actually triple our budget?"

Seeing Olivia proudly declaring that we should take money from somewhere else because we didn't have enough…

How should I put it?

I was kind of a delinquent as well, but even I thought that she was just as strange as me.

* * *

The Temple Student Council.

There were student councils for each school, and then there was a general student council that presided over all the others.

Temple's secondary education began at the age of 17 and ended at 22. That meant that the Temple Student Council presided over all other ones over the course of six years.

Of course, there was a lot of budget allocated to them, so it was possible to request more from them.

The money they had rolling around was bound to be different from the Royal Class's.

Ceres van Owen, the president of the Royal Class student council, also had some sway in the Temple Student Council, but in the end, she was outnumbered.

The Temple Student Council itself was already a huge power within Temple.

The level of support we could receive from the Royal Class had its limitations. Of course, they could always ask for more, but they had already held a faculty meeting in which the teachers had decided how much was to be given to us. It was highly unlikely that we could ask for any more.

I wasn't sure what would happen later, but usually, if a new club asked for more money, they would be told that they were spouting weird nonsense.

So the only way for me to get more money was by getting it from the Student Council.

After our club meeting, I went down to the dormitory.

"The Student Council?"

"Yeah, the money we got is already the most they could give us, so they are the only ones who could give us more."

"Hmmm…"

Harriet was the one who'd recklessly told me to get more money, but when she confirmed that the reaction I received wasn't that good, she seemed troubled, her

mouth twisting slightly.

But I'd also made them do something weird all of a sudden, so I wanted to get them a generous budget from somewhere.

"Will the Student Council increase our budget that easily?"

"I doubt it."

'Ceres needs more money? Why?'

It seemed like the Student Council President didn't have much of a reaction to our request.

Harriet seemed to feel a little sorry, thinking that she had asked too much of me.

"Still, we'll be able to use more money than our actual budget."

"Why?"

"We… We decided to use all the funds we receive as the club's budget."

Magic major students received more research funding than other students, and on request, would receive a lot more than the standard amount.

It seemed like the members had already agreed to spend all their research funds they'd received as the club's budget. Separate from my coercion, it looked like they were interested in those research projects.

"Then how much do we have in total?"

"Uhm… It varies slightly from field to field. Adelia and I receive the most, which is 1,000 gold coins a semester. I know that Christina gets 700 and Anna 500. Maybe if we try to request a bit more… We would have more than 3,000 gold coins in total."

Adelia, whose magic talent was rather money-consuming, and Harriet, who held a talent in all fields of magic, received about 500 million won as funds every semester.

Magic majors really received support beyond any imagination.

In any case, it could be estimated that our budget would approximately amount to 8 billion won.

"Why are you suddenly talking about money?"

Liana de Grantz stopped by and sat on the sofa near us after hearing us talk as she passed by.

“Is it about that Magic Research Society?”

“Yes.”

Liana nodded, knowing about the Magic Research Society, she seemed to understand what we were talking about.

“What do you even need so much money for?”

“We’re going to develop various things, but we don’t know how to make them yet, so we feel like we’ll need a lot more money than our current budget.”

We had no way of knowing how much money we would have to spend to get the results we wanted.

We had a huge budget and the members' funds, but we still didn’t know if the research would bear any fruits with that.

If all amounted to nothing, we would have literally blown all the budget we had into the wind.

“We have already received as much support as we could get from the Royal Class, they even went all the way to the Student Council to knock on some doors.”

At Harriet’s words, Liana simply tilted her head.

“Do you really have to only get money from inside of Temple?”

My eyes lit up at Liana’s words.

“Why? Will you give us money then?”

Don't you have a lot of money?

"…Seriously. I hate to say this, but sometimes, you're simply too much of a beggar. Man, it's just… ugly."

I didn't even say that much, but when I started talking about her giving us money, it seemed like Liana's evaluation of me dropped quite a bit.

"I don't know what you're going to make, but if you succeed, will you be able to make money off of it?"

Harriet tilted her head at Liana's words, but the answer came out rather fast.

"It's not just on the level of being able to make money off of it, it would be a historical moment."

Moonshine and Power Cartridges…

I wasn't so sure about Dimensional Magic, but we could definitely turn those two things into money.

"Hmm, then, wouldn't it be fine to sign a business contract with an outsider to receive research funding?"

Why did we only want to get money from Temple?

We should just find some place that would invest in us.

After Liana pointed it out, I finally realized that, while I came up with that plan for the Rotary Gang's business, I haven't even considered it for our club.

"Are you a genius?"

"Anyway, if you can draw up a business plan or research plan, you should. You know that much, right?"

Liana crossed her arms and smiled confidently.

"Money, that's something my family has a lot of."

Objects that might change the course of history if they got developed…

The Duke of Grantz could afford to invest in such items however much he wanted.

“Huh? Then, should I ask my dad as well?”

Harriet de Saint-Owan also nodded her head.

If it was an investment, and not just simply giving away one’s own money, that wasn’t too much to ask.

The Grand Duke of Saint-Owan…

The Duke of Grantz…

If we received the support of those two families, our budget would be limitless.

* * *

A few days later…

“I was scolded by my father.”

When Liana returned to Temple, she shrugged her shoulders and said as much.

“…You got scolded?”

Liana seemed a little embarrassed after hearing my question, so she scratched her cheek slightly.

“He told me not to talk any nonsense and that the research plan was too abstract and completely groundless.”

It was only natural if one thought about it a bit more.

‘We (some 17-year-olds) will make items that will change the world, so give us money.’

Who the hell would invest in some kids? Temple gave us money because it was Temple. Of course, external forces wouldn’t simply trust us.

Even if we handed it to Temple's Graduate Research Center or the Magic Tower, they would call our plans unbelievable. Anyway, no matter how much money an organization or person had, they wouldn't just invest their money into some research that was obviously going to fail.

Just because one had a lot of money didn't mean one could just spend it on whatever one came across.

I mean, they obviously had no real reason to invest in us.

"Anyway, I'm sorry."

"What are you sorry for? I'm already happy enough that you even handed our proposal to the Duke."

"…Oh, really? Then why don't you start respecting this daughter of a duke more often?"

"When we graduate."

"Okay. Let's stop here."

It was bound for her to clumsily mess up like that.

Whenever she did something really well, she would always slip up at the most crucial point.

Liana de Grantz, who always acted rather cold and cool, showed her charm when she slipped up and started to act all flustered.

Liana had failed.

Soon after…

Seeing Harriet come back with her head bright red, I felt like I already knew the result of her talk.

"I'll never talk to my dad ever again!"

It seemed like they had gotten into a big fight.

CHAPTER 224

Liana was scolded by the Duke of Grantz for asking to invest in us.

Harriet had gotten into a fight with her father.

The last time I'd seen her interacting with her father, she'd seemed like a constantly yapping dog.

The Grand Duke of Saint-Owan had probably said something like "My dear daughter, what nonsense is this?" That reaction was only natural.

And then she'd probably responded with "I don't know! Give me money! Invest in us! We can make all of this!"

Still, it seemed like Grand Duke Saint-Owan was rather strict with things like that. I thought he was simply an idiot for his daughter, but when his daughter told him to give her tens of billions of gold coins for something weird, he'd clearly told her that there was no way that was happening.

I could fully understand the positions of the people who didn't want to invest in us.

Even the kids I'd asked to develop those items thought it was impossible, but it sure was fortunate that they didn't get offended when asked to put their own money into the projects…

Anyway, because even immediate family members had rejected our request for investment, it was pretty much obvious what would happen if we asked an outside party to invest in us.

In the end, it just reminded me how amazing it was that Temple had actually granted us a budget of 5,000 gold coins.

It seemed like Mr. Epinhauser and Mr. Mustrang had worked hard in places we couldn't see.

At the end of the day, I wasn't actually that disappointed that we didn't get more

money.

While it was an unconventional method to approach others for investment, it was also rather risky.

The Duke of Grantz and the Grand Duke of Saint-Owan…

If those two families had agreed to invest, they would've held some stakes in Moonshine and the Power Cartridges. We would have had to have shared our findings with them so that they could create more and sell them however they saw fit.

In other words, even if we were the ones to develop the items, they weren't actually ours.

They were very dangerous goods that would cause a rapid increase in strength all across the continent.

We had to never lose control over those objects.

The cooperation of those two prestigious families…

Regardless of how advantageous it might have been, it was also more than dangerous to take their money.

So even if we didn't receive any investment, it was fine, as we would take on a huge risk if we actually received the money.

However, it was still true that we needed more money.

A lot more money than we had.

Apart from their study time, everyone was also working hard on their research.

As such, we started to organize everything into items that had already been purchased and items that still needed to be purchased.

As a result, a necessary event had taken place within the club.

Louis Ankton, the smartest among us, had taken on a new post as our general

secretary because the amount of work was simply too much for me, the president, alone.

That guy was like a human calculator, so he was able to handle numbers quite quickly, and he had stuffed a lot of knowledge about magic into his brain.

Louis's role was actually rather important.

I had no clue about magic, so I'd given the members permission to use some of the budget money if they needed something.

However, Louis knew why they needed those things, and he also knew if they didn't actually need some of those things. Louis was a non-wizard version of Harriet—he had knowledge of almost all fields of magic, so he was able to pin-point the intentions behind their demands and verify whether they were valid.

When Louis Ankton listed all necessary equipment, supplies, the members' reasons for requesting them, and finished talking to each member, he would bring the list to me and I would approve the use of the budget and request Temple to buy those supplies.

I was in charge of the external affairs, while Louis was in charge of internal and specialized affairs.

In the end, that was more than necessary because the members were already spending their money quite fiercely.

"We don't have enough information to create a statistic to show our average expenditures, but at this rate, our budget will be exhausted in a week or so after our next group mission."

"Is it really that bad?"

"Yeah. There are a lot of materials that need to be prepared, and while we don't have to buy a lot more new equipment, there are still some things we need. Our expenditures will be a lot less after everything is bought, but they won't completely stop."

"…Geez."

No. Could it be that the signs of an impending financial crisis were already visible?

I mean, we had five billion won?

No? When did it turn into 4.5 billion won?

How did that make any sense?

"You're the one who told them not to worry about money and just buy whatever they needed first… Should I limit their spendings?"

Louis looked me in my eyes as he spoke, but I simply shook my head.

"No. Let them buy it if they need it. I made them develop some ridiculous things, so I can't just tell them to save money."

Louis predicted that the required budget had already far exceeded what we had. There was still some room, but it would soon be completely gone.

"I'll do something about this."

Guys…

Daddy'll get you some money!

If not, I'll make some!

* * *

After preparing various things and having been kept busy with a lot of things other than training, I could finally ditch the crutches. Of course, I still couldn't go for runs or do strenuous exercises. That, too, was an order from the yoga master teacher.

It seemed that, just by receiving some treatment, I had already learned something about Magic Body Strengthening, though I of course didn't feel anything different.

Anyway, I was slowly recovering.

The Orbis Class' problem seemed to have gotten prolonged. In the end, that was also trouble that I had caused, but as it revealed the internal absurdities of the Orbis

Class, I wondered whether they would still say what I'd caused was trouble.

Because if they couldn't resolve those absurdities, there was a possibility things could have only gotten worse.

I felt a bit anxious.

However, the Orbis Class issue had already left my hands.

What I needed to focus on next was the Magic Research Society's problem.

Money…

Couldn't I just make some money through Self-Suggestion?

No matter what, money will come our way.

I sure wished that something like that would work, but there was no way it actually would.

"This is an absurdly large budget increase you're requesting…"

…So I went to the student council room.

There were two people there.

Temple's Student Council president, the fifth-year Rain Kali.

And the Vice-President, the fourth-year Hermann von Rogarius.

Well, while it was certainly possible, it was still rather interesting that the president was actually a commoner and the vice-president was an aristocrat. The vice-president seemed to be a noble and high-ranking aristocrat of Kernstadt, while Rain Kali was a commoner directly under the control of the Empire.

That was all stuff I had heard from Ceres.

She didn't come with me. She said that it could be interpreted as the Royal Class trying to put pressure on them if she came along.

She went on her own first and said that if things didn't go well, I should go on my own and ask them to think it over again.

The president, Rain Kali, was a beauty that gave off quite the cold impression.

The vice-president, Hermann von Rogarius, similarly seemed cool-headed and calm.

Both had faces suited for their positions as student council executives.

And there was one more thing they had in common…

They both had thick, dark circles under their eyes.

'There are more than 100 students in the student council. It was almost the same amount of students the Royal Class had.'

'There could only be one reason why they had so many members, right?'

'They just have that much work.'

'That's why the work of the student council president and vice-president doesn't allow them to properly take care of their studies. As such, just being the student council president and vice-president for one whole year would replace all the first-year curriculum.'

The student council presided over more than 100,000 Temple students.

The vice-president and president didn't visit classes at all because they just had too much work to do for the student council. They couldn't, to be exact. Therefore, just working for the student council was considered to be a completion of the curriculum.

Nonetheless, dark circles still formed under their eyes.

'They are a lot busier in the second semester, so both of them should be very sensitive at the moment.'

'Why?'

'Because of the festival.'

The school festival… Planning and implementing it was the student council's main task in the second semester. Therefore, it was obvious that the two of them would be really busy at that moment.

And there I was going there to make quite an unreasonable request to drastically increase our club budget to those two people. Rain Kali glanced over the papers I handed over with a rather businesslike expression.

"I read your statement. There is a shortage of research and development funds. However, for your existing budget to be insufficient even though you received about 5,000 gold coins, which is most of the Royal Class club support budget…"

"Yes."

She didn't just tell me to go away because she couldn't be bothered to deal with it.

"Of course, the Royal Class clubs are also able to receive support from the student council, but this is an unprecedented issue. Originally, each special class has to solve these issues with their internal budget."

"Are you refusing then?"

"I'm not saying that we won't do it just because there isn't a precedent. If there's a valid reason, there's no reason not to agree to a budget increase."

They seemed quite businesslike, but their attitudes and the way they thought were actually rather flexible.

I couldn't help but to silently stare at her.

What the hell?

"President, your nose is bleeding."

"Hmm."

Suddenly, while wearing an expression befitting of an iron mask, blood was dripping from Rain Kali's nose.

The vice-president took out a handkerchief and handed it to her as if he was already

familiar with that situation, and she used the handkerchief to wipe away the blood.

“Hey, erm. Are you okay?”

“It happens a lot.”

I thought as much, neither of them seemed surprised.

What the fuck.

Didn’t that seem kind of weird and sad? I mean, wasn’t she actually in a pretty dangerous state?

* * *

Of course, Rain Kali continued to speak smoothly while holding her nose with the handkerchief, not seeming to care about it.

“The amount requested is 15,000 gold coins. There is no other club that has received that high of a budget before.”

“I know that magic research requires a large amount of money. However, even the largest magic research club in Temple only receives a budget of 5,000 gold coins.”

“You might think that it’s just a bit bigger than the Royal Class’ club, but their club actually has 200 members. It’s by far not as small as your club.”

“Also, that club has achieved excellent results in their magical research, which is why it receives support to such an extent. They didn’t get that level of support right from the start.”

“Even if your members are a part of the Royal Class, the club has only six members. It’s just a newly-created club that hasn’t accomplished anything yet.”

“I mean, there is nothing. No results. Nothing at all.”

“It’s completely impossible for us to provide financial support on such a scale just because you are part of a special class.”

“A budget of this size is only handed out to specialized graduate research institutes.

They are ‘labs’ that couldn’t even be compared to a mere club, overviewed by a professor whose prowess in magic has already been officially verified. Of course, if you meet these conditions, you would be able to get even more than 15,000 gold coins, but you do not.”

That was right.

Both of them just said that it was impossible.

In the end, the newly created club hadn’t accomplished anything yet, and it was impossible to receive such a large amount of funding just because we had big plans.

“We need the money for our research, but we’ll only get funds if we have a good track record? Isn’t that putting the cart before the horse? In order to achieve results, we need the research funding.”

“It’s not like you don’t have any research funds, though, you say that it’s lacking. I can’t grasp with any form of common sense why you need more even after receiving such a large amount of support.”

“Don’t you think we need a budget going beyond any common sense when we plan on developing things that go beyond any form of common sense?”

The president and the vice-president stared at me after I said those words.

I felt like they really wanted me to give me a mouthful.

“Temple is a place which enjoys the Imperial family’s great support and thrives through the tuition fees paid by its students. However, we do not have unlimited capital.”

“I suppose so.”

“We can’t spend money on things that are not well-founded. It seems unlikely that the items you are planning on developing will actually be developed. That is a fact. The reliability of your ability to create such items is also very low. This, too, is a fact.”

Rain Kali didn’t seem to be criticizing me.

She was the one who’d protected Exodium, a club for kids suffering from 8th-grade

syndrome, quite a lot when they were getting suspected for being worshippers of the demon gods.

I could predict to a certain extent that she was a good person with a good heart, but that didn't mean that she was a pushover.

"People lean on possibilities. Because there is no way of knowing the future, we can only judge matters based on their probability. You insist that you will make items with a very low likelihood to be made with a group with unclear capabilities for which you require a large budget. The student council simply cannot afford to sink its money into such a place."

"Of course, if you were just a hobby club that didn't actually have any serious club activities, we could support you with a club room, take over your dining expenses, and grant you the supplies needed for your activities."

"However, such clubs usually have small budgets to begin with. With that scale of support, they are able to do whatever they want to do."

"However, faced with a huge focus such as magic research, the necessary budget has to be very, very large."

"What I mean to say is that I can't grant you a budget of that size without any grounds. Do you understand?"

Her answer ended up being very long, but I had expected as much.

We can't give you anything. You have nothing with which to prove your ability other than being part of the Royal Class.

If we didn't have any achievements, we wouldn't be granted more research funds. However, we required research funds to achieve good results.

"Then you need us to have achievements, right? Proof of our capabilities, to be precise, right?"

"We would review your request then."

In other words, they wouldn't even consider it with how things stood.

I took something out of my pocket and placed it on the president's table.

"…What is this?"

It was a blue bracelet.

"It's a bracelet with a disposable protection magic cast on it."

It was Ceres van Owen's last piece of advice.

'Oh, right. There's something you need to know about the student council president… '

'Rain Kali is majoring in magic.'

The protection bracelet.

Ellen had used hers, but I still had mine.

"What is this about?"

"It was made by a first-year in my class."

Rain Kali's face showed a slightly surprised expression.

"In two days."

Those words were enough to turn slight surprise into astonishment.

* * *

Rain Kali looked at the protection bracelet on her desk with her eyes wide open.

"…You said they made an enchanted item in two days? A first-year?"

"Yes."

I had no idea just how amazing that achievement was. However, I could predict to some extent what those members from the student council would say.

We hadn't achieved anything yet… I was 100% sure that they would talk about our performance.

So I had asked something of Harriet.

'Hey, you remember this? This here."

'Yeah? Uhm, Why?"

Before going to the student council, I'd asked Harriet about the protection bracelet.

'Is something like this hard to make?'

'Oh? E-erm… Well… '

Harriet was extremely proud of her skills, but she wasn't one to boast, so her face seemed to shrivel up at my question.

'In how many days did you make them?'

'Two… days?"

'How long would it usually take? Let's say… the other first-year wizards who are in your class, how long would they take?'

'Oh, uhm… Tha-that's… Urg… '

Harriet couldn't speak properly, just mumbling slightly while wiggling her fingers, too embarrassed to say these things with her own mouth.

'Ah, this is important, so hurry up and tell me. What's wrong with you now?'

'I-is that so…?'

'Are you going to talk properly now? How long would it take for the other general class students to make an item like this?'

'Well, that's… '

'Hey!'

‘Why are you getting mad, you idiot! They can’t! Alright!’

Harriet screamed at my urging and went away in a huff.

Anyway…

The disposable protection bracelet was produced in two days.

Her classmates were not only unable to create something like that in that period of time, they were completely unable to create it.

That was why Rain Kali was so dumbfounded.

“They made two, to be exact. It was a collaborative work between two magic major students from Class A: one who specialized in magic crafting, the other only had introductory-level knowledge in the field.”

Harriet and Adelia.

While she was pretty much overshadowed by Harriet, Adelia was also one heck of a genius. Adelia had been in charge of the basic designs of the bracelets while Harriet had helped.

They both majored in magic, but they were both first-years and still beginners in the field.

They’d both managed to make something like that.

“Making something like that… In two days…”

Rain Kali murmured blankly.

“Ms. president. Your nosebleed.”

“Hmm.”

That was when her nose started spilling blood again as she stared blankly. She wiped her nose with the handkerchief again.

No, that girl… Wasn’t what she needed a serious rest? I felt like she might die if that

went on.

“You said it’s disposable, so I can’t just activate it to check its effect. But if it’s like that, I won’t be able to judge whether the protection actually worked properly. Two days is just too short of a production period.”

The president’s doubts about whether the magic worked properly were reasonable.

“You said two were made?”

“I did.”

“So that means you used one.”

I grinned.

“In the Darklands.”

That meant that we had already verified their ability.

CHAPTER 225

I briefly explained how and under what circumstances the other protection bracelet had been used.

The detailed verification was based on the Adventurers' Guild's assessment, which had already been reported to Temple, so what I said was credible. If she wanted to check further, she could just use the disposable protection bracelet.

"Royal Class…"

The president seemed as if she was just reminded again about the Royal Class' overwhelming capabilities.

"That's what one of us is capable of if they work on their own. The Magic Research Society is a group that brings all the magic major students of Royal Class together."

Our claims weren't entirely unfounded.

It was by far not enough evidence, but it definitely was a piece of evidence at least.

"I'm absolutely convinced that those guys that go beyond all common sense are definitely going to produce results that go against any form of common sense as well."

The Royal Class wasn't a place to which common sense applied. It was a place which gathered people who should never be judged by ordinary people's standards.

It was a place where those bundles of absurdities called talents grew to do things that shouldn't have been possible according to any form of plausibility.

The pinnacle of those absurdities were people like Ellen Artorius.

Harriet de Saint-Owan was also someone like that.

However, that was not sufficient enough to persuade them.

“If our achievements are insufficient, we could just make something like this or a bit greater than this for now.”

Our budget wasn't exactly lacking. If we needed achievements to get a higher budget, we would opt to create some plausible items rather than absurd ones for a bit.

Christina's Alchemy…

And Adelia’s Magic Crafting.

If I combined those two, we would automatically end up with some decent results.

"I just came here because I don’t like to waste time with unnecessary interim goals just to reach our main goal.”

However, the only thing that mattered to me was time.

Both the president and the vice-president fell silent.

“We’ll review it.”

“Thank you."

As such, I made it possible to get our request reviewed even after I was told that they wouldn’t even glance at it because of our circumstances. Leaving those words behind, the student council president continued to stare at me.

“Just between us, you aren’t a magic major, right, Reinhardt?”

“…No. I’m not.”

‘What the?’

I had introduced myself, but I hadn’t told them what I was majoring in.

“Why are you the president of the Magic Research Society?”

“…Since those guys only know how to study, they need someone to make them do these kinds of things, so I’m the one who forces them to stay on task.”

"…You're nosy. As expected."

Nosy…

What did she mean by 'as expected'?

"Do you know me?"

I tilted my head at her words that made it seem as if she already knew me beforehand.

"Yeah, we know all about you."

The one who answered my question wasn't the president, but the vice-president.

"We have to pull all these all-nighters because of what you did, after all."

"…What do you mean by 'because of what I did'?"

"The Orbis Class."

"Ah."

The Orbis Class incident…

Although it was rather obvious that the student council would know about it, what did they mean by saying that they had to pull all-nighters because of it?

The vice-president opened his mouth, a calm expression on his face, as he handed another handkerchief to Rain Kali, whose nosebleed had started again.

"As the Orbis Class had to undergo an emergency closure, the festival competition was canceled."

"…Ah."

"So all of us had to stay up all night to prepare something else to fill its spot."

The Orbis Class's emergency closure…

As a result, certain events had been canceled.

The student council was struggling to fill those holes with something else.

How should I put it?

That was what one called the butterfly effect.

Being confronted with the consequences of my actions in such unexpected places was quite uncomfortable for me, no matter how many times I experienced it.

So that was why the student council already knew me before they'd even met me.

Naturally, it was really obvious what kind of impression they had of me.

And yet I couldn't believe that they didn't even swear at me after I went to them to request more money.

I would have bashed my head in as soon as I went through that door if I were in their shoes.

In the end, I had to admit that those two were a lot more generous than I'd initially thought.

* * *

The student council hadn't decided to give us more budget, they'd only said that they would review our request, so nothing was certain yet.

I wasn't sure if the money would suffice, even if we were granted a budget increase. Anyway, the more money we got, the better.

It's said that no one knows what might happen in the future, but there were just too many things I didn't know.

In the first semester, I would have never guessed that I would go around collecting research funds in my second semester.

I had thought about doing various things outside of training, but running around to borrow money wasn't one of those things.

If the student council's answer was negative, I was wondering whether we should really just work on other projects to forcefully create achievements first.

Anyway, we had no other choice but to wait for the student council's answer.

"Reinhardt, what happened?"

Upon returning to the Royal Class dormitory, I saw Olivia Lanze waiting for my return in the first-year dorm.

"…Why are you here?"

"What? I just wanted to see my future husband. Aren't I allowed to come visit?"

'I'm really upset!'

Saying something along those lines, she pretended to be sulky and turned around.

She was doing some crazy things again, but she was actually acting really cute, so I felt like I was about to go crazy myself!

The way the other students passing by looked at me was getting really weird again! I was trying to take care of my image those days, but every time she appeared, things took weird turns!

Liana, who also passed by us, was totally looking at me with an expression that seemed to scream, "Ah. That damn playboy's at it again. Tsk tsk!"

"I never agreed to anything like that, and I don't want to, either, so please stop doing these things in front of all the other students!"

"Oh, then, what if no one else sees us…?"

Goddamnit.

You're just going to get scared again.

Isn't that right?

“Oh. Okay. Shall we go somewhere private then?”

As I coolly murmured those things, Olivia Lanze flinched.

“Ah. Th-that’s… I was just… I was just kidding, just kidding!”

Olivia was making quite exaggerated gestures, seeming so nervous that she might actually faint if I really dragged her somewhere.

I knew how to handle that girl very well.

—I just had to act fierce. It was a different kind of fierce from how I acted towards Adelia and the others.

“So what is it?”

“W-well, I just wanted to ask if the budget negotiations went well… Why do you always get so mad when you see me…?”

She seemed a little upset. Genuinely upset.

Oh, was I a bit too harsh?

“I got them to say that they would review our request, though they declared that they would absolutely refuse it at first. Well, I don’t know what’ll happen yet.”

* * *

Knowing that it was something I was troubled by, it seemed like she’d come in person because she’d gotten curious as to how things were progressing.

Well, I shouldn’t be too harsh to her, considering that she is on my side.

I’d actually received a lot of help from her.

No, but she was still much too aggressive.

I noticed Ellen looking at us from afar.

I didn’t know why, but I felt pretty scared at that moment. I knew that she was just

looking at us, but her expression seemed to scream, “Huh? Why is she here?”

I felt like I was about to panic!

Was I about to get killed?

I seriously felt like I was about to die.

I had no idea what reason might have caused it, but I was convinced that I would die that day for sure!

"I’ve been thinking about some things. Regarding your budget… There might actually be a different way you could get some money.”

Fortunately, Olivia didn’t continue to say strange things and changed the subject.

No, but…

A way to increase our budget?

How did that girl come up with something like that? While I didn’t know what kind of method it was, the more money we could get, the better, and it was Olivia Lanze who came up with that alternative way.

“What is it?”

“You could take donations.”

“…What?”

Never in my life would I have been able to come up with something like that

If you don’t have money, just take donations.

Just what line of thought was that?

* * *

No one was willing to invest in us.

Having our budget raised was also difficult…

So we should just get some donations.

Just what kind of nonsense was that?

Olivia said, “How about that? Aren't I smart?” with a confident tone, her nose almost piercing the sky.

“…Well, It seems like you came up with that because religious groups make a lot of money that way. That won’t work.”

You don’t have any money? Then a good, pious, and rich believer will just give you some!

Was it only possible for someone who was part of such religious groups to have such out-of-the-norm ideas?

Was she unable to let go of that way of thinking even though she had already given up on her faith?

Olivia Lanze looked genuinely shocked at my words.

“You, you… You think… That I’m a complete idiot, don’t you…?”

She looked incredibly upset.

Olivia wore a tearful expression. No, how could her mood go up and down like a rollercoaster? As far as I knew, she definitely wasn’t that kind of person before.

I think it’s what one would call bipolar.

Olivia started pouting her lips in addition to her tearful expression.

“I was talking about the sponsorship group meeting, you idiot.”

“…Sponsorship?”

Seeming slightly excited, Olivia went, ‘Hmpf!’

What the hell were that girl's actual character traits? She seemed like a strange amalgamation of all the character attributes one could find.

Sometimes she was cold and cool, other times she was super sweet, then she acted like a heroine of justices at times, and sometimes she was a complete ditz.

All those different attributes seemed to mix together quite a bit, which made it even crazier. Olivia crouched slightly with her cheeks puffed and her arms crossed. Soon, she started talking a little more.

"The Royal Class is run with Temple's capital, but it also has its own sponsorship groups. The more free money one can get, the better, after all. Your club is in a similar situation, right?"

Sponsorship groups… I had no idea such things existed.

"Do a lot of rich people participate in that?"

"If they aren't rich, why would they be part of something like that? The purpose of a sponsorship itself is to create connections with future talented individuals, Temple teachers, or the entire Royal Class in advance. I've been attending voluntarily since my fourth year, so I'm not sure how things go for students of the lower years. Anyway, that's how it is."

One could participate in sponsorship meetings starting from the fourth year.

The Gate Incident would happen when the main characters reached their third year, so it'd never even appeared in the original.

"It's not just rich people, but there are also many influential figures like members of the Magic Association, some prestigious knights, and other similarly influential people attending. They can provide you with personal sponsorships as well as sponsorships intended for the Temple and the Royal Class as a whole."

Sponsorship meetings were held to support, recruit, or create connections with the Empire's future outstanding talents. When I thought about it, it made sense that something like that existed.

The best talents of the entire Empire were gathered at Temple. If they were students majoring in magic, they would go to the Magic Association, and those majoring in

combat would join places like the Knights Templar. What about supernatural power users? They would also join a knight corps. Anyway, they would receive recruitment offers from places that needed them.

—The same went for students majoring in non-combat subjects.

A smart guy like Louis Ankton might be treated even better, actually.

"That's why I was planning on going to the sponsorship meeting this time to look for someone that might want to support your club, and here you are treating me like an idiot."

It seemed like she had been deeply shocked by my saying she could only make such absurd claims because she had been part of a religious group that'd received a lot of donations.

'Wow, he thinks I'm a real dumbass.' That was what she thought.

Right, I really went too far. She was a real angel who wanted to try getting money from the sponsorship meeting for my sake.

"Well… I-I'm sorry, I was the one in the wrong."

"So what if you're sorry?"

"…What?"

"Do you think it's the end just because you said you're sorry?"

Olivia tapped her cheek.

"You should give me a kiss."

"Oh, fuck off!"

In the end, it still turned out like that!

CHAPTER 226

I wasn't even sure anymore if what I'd made was a club or a startup. I should've been resting because of my injury, but there I was focusing on something else because I couldn't train.

There was still some time before the regular Royal Class sponsorship meeting that would be after our next group mission. Although it had been suggested that students of the fourth year or higher could voluntarily attend, there didn't seem to be a problem if students of lower grades wanted to attend either.

I could've just left it to Olivia Lanze, but if I sent her alone, I felt like she might've ended up saying something she shouldn't…

I was grateful to her in many ways, but I was just concerned, as I couldn't predict what she might do.

There was actually one more thing I had to take care of besides the Magic Research Society's matters.

"We don't really have to do anything."

"…Really?"

The Rotary Gang's headquarters…

I was listening to Loyar's report in her office.

"Yes, the people dispatched by the prince are taking care of everything including investment negotiations and licensing issues. We literally only need to dispatch some people."

It had been decided that Bertus would take 10% of the business' profits.

However, even if he asked for 90%, it wouldn't have been weird, as the people he'd

dispatched seemed to take care of everything. It felt like the profit he stood to gain would be far too little to go that far.

"Of course, it isn't to the point that I would lose track of the whole picture. Some of the experienced people from the gang are tagging along with them."

It seemed like Bertus's people and the gang members that'd dipped their toes into the business world before were working together.

—That was what one called personal connections.

The more I experienced those kinds of things, the less I could call our situation helpless.

"For now, we plan to set up about 50 shops in advance, giving priority to stations with a lot of floating population."

The business seemed to be progressing quite well.

Loyar, who actually hated paying attention to those kinds of things, was actually able to do a proper business report. Hadn't she said that she hated administrative work and work that needed her to use her brain when she'd refused my plan to absorb the Thieves' guild?

However, in the end, Loyar was actually able to manage the business, although it would take quite a lot of brain power.

With the help of the people sent by Bertus, the construction of our shops in each station seemed to proceed with no problems.

"Doesn't your head hurt?"

She didn't like that sort of thing, so she should've felt stressed, but when I asked Loyar about it, she just shook her head.

"I just have to nod my head when they say that they'll do something or that they've done something. I don't really have to use my head that much other than to memorize the things I've been told."

"Hmm, are you sure that they're doing a good job then?"

"They even present me estimated sales and expected net profit approximations without being prompted. What else could I expect?"

What the hell?

It was basically Bertus's business at that point, so wasn't it just too nonsensical that I actually took 90% of the profit?

It seemed that the people Bertus had sent did things before she even knew what needed to be done, so it looked like she'd decided to just stop caring.

However, Loyar seemed somewhat uneasy. It was as if she had some other concerns.

"Your Highness, will you be alright?"

"What?"

"You're getting too deeply involved… In everything."

Was it about that?

Loyar had already been outed as the Rotary Gang leader and had been connected to Prince Bertus.

Of course, Loyar was originally known as Irene's Wild Dog. Bertus might already have somewhat known of Loyar. However, he didn't know that she was actually a demon.

And I would also have no other choice but to be exposed to the outside world. as I'd created such big businesses and had such deep connections to the Imperial Prince and Princess.

I wasn't so sure about Loyar, but the Magic Research Society was also one such place where I had to expose myself.

"This might place you in danger."

Apart from that business, the things I'd done in Temple had absolutely nothing to do with the demon realm.

“They are things I have to do, so what do you want me to do?”

“…”

Loyar fell silent after I said that I had no other choice.

It wasn’t like I had to do those things for the sake of rebuilding the demon realm.

They were the things we had to prepare for the Gate Crisis. It wasn’t for the sake of the demon realm that I created that club at Temple or threw myself into such ridiculously burdensome projects.

I grouped the kids together in advance so that they wouldn’t absolutely need me.

One never knew what might happen in life, and so I didn’t know when my identity would be revealed.

If that were to happen, I would have to flee the Imperial Capital as well as Temple.

The way I set things up, the kids would get stronger on their own, even without me.

I believed that would be all it would take.

However, would it actually work?

I didn’t want to leave Temple.

I had made too many precious connections there.

* * *

I had been severely injured and could finally get rid of my crutches, however, I had to face the consequences of my actions in the end.

1st Place - Ellen

2nd Place - Louis Ankton

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21st Place - Ludwig

22nd Place - Reinhardt

These were the results of the midterm exams.

I ended up in last place.

I even fell under Ludwig.

Something that hadn't happened in the original happened once again.

What a miraculous plunge from my 1st rank in the midterms of the first semester.

-…

Everyone was looking at me with slight agitation.

[Achievement reached - Get placed last on the midterms]

[Received 500 Achievement Points.]

[Special Achievement - Fall to the same place as the Idiot (Ludwig) or lower]

[Received 100 Achievement Points.]

Ah…

I'd done it intentionally…

And yet I got pretty ticked off again.

To get placed last on the midterm exam for the second semester, I'd purposefully done very badly.

There were also quite a few days where I'd missed class as a whole because of my fainting and my severe injuries. Unlike subjects that were part of our common classes, most specialized classes were practical. The strain that was put on the body in classes such as Swordsmanship, Supernatural Power Control, and Comprehensive P.E. was really large.

The only specialized subjects that didn't include practical lessons were Mana Sensitivity Training and Demon Ecology.

As such, I pretty much failed because I couldn't participate in all the midterm exams.

Of course, due to that being an unavoidable situation due to my injuries, the midterm evaluation would be revised to reflect my actual score during the final exams, but as of then, I had failed the midterm exams.

There wasn't any big difference in our common class subjects either. There were many days when I wasn't able to go to class, and I hadn't been able to properly concentrate on them at all because of all the other things I had to take care of.

Of course, I could have done a lot better if I'd actually wanted to study, but that was just how it turned out. I'd simply thrown it.

If I'm going to fail, I should fail properly to get achievement points.

I didn't really want to fail on purpose, but because of my injuries, it pretty much

became impossible to get any good grades, so I just blew it big time to get more achievement points.

As such, I received 500 achievement points because of that challenge, as well as 100 more for completing some strange achievement.

Shit.

I couldn't believe that I'd fallen lower than that idiot, Ludwig.

No, 'idiot' was Harriet's nickname.

I was more stupid than Ludwig.

Wasn't that a bit too harsh?

No one made fun of me because they knew that I had been busy with a lot of things in addition to getting seriously hurt.

No…

Still, getting last place was a bit…

I knew that all of them were thinking something similar judging by their expressions.

But so what?

I believed that getting achievement points was more important. Anyway, an achievement was an achievement.

* * *

Harriet de Saint-Owan was shocked upon seeing the results of the midterm exam.

Reinhardt, who had been ranked first in the overall ranking during the midterm exams in the previous semester, came in last.

While they weren't that close, she did know that guy by the name of Ludwig, who had always been ranked last—an extraordinary idiot.

They weren't on friendly terms, but whenever he met her, he would always greet her with a bright smile.

She wished that Reinhardt had half of that guy's personality.

No, she might actually hate it if he resembled him even by an ounce.

Reinhardt looking at her and smiling brightly?

If he did something like that…

She felt like she would absolutely hate it.

Did you eat something wrong?

—That was probably what she would say if she saw him acting like that.

Anyway, that was the only impression Harriet had of Ludwig.

Not too long ago, during a Magic Research Society meeting, she'd heard from Louis Ankton, who was that guy's classmate, that he was a devastatingly stupid guy.

However, Reinhardt had gotten even lower grades than that devastatingly stupid idiot.

Normally, she would have enjoyed teasing him for getting placed last, watching his face turn beet red, but she couldn't do it that time.

Reinhardt had placed first during the midterms in the first semester—he wasn't stupid.

He'd just failed all practical exams due to his injuries.

However, if he'd scored just a few points on the written exams, his grades wouldn't have been lower than Ludwig's.

It wasn't like he didn't study…

He couldn't.

'Bring in more money.'

—Because of what she'd said.

All of their classmates were astonished in their own way by Reinhardt placing last.

Even Bertus was surprised.

As always, the only one who remained expressionless was Ellen. Reinhardt didn't seem to care that he was in last place either.

However, Harriet couldn't help but care about that result.

She had told him to get more research funds.

She had actually meant it as a joke. She'd just been teasing him, saying something like, "Since you make us do such unreasonable things, you should get to work as our president as well."

In the end, Reinhardt went around trying to gather some money with an attitude as if it was a matter of course that he should do something like that.

So she felt very embarrassed. Just what was he talking about? Matter of course?

As if it was natural, he was determined to get more money for their research.

She'd heard that he'd gone to club meetings and even visited the Temple student council, which one normally didn't have to go to until one graduated from Temple.

He'd also talked to that strange fifth-year senior, Olivia Lanze, who seemed so dazzling that one would get blinded just by looking at her, so she felt strangely uncomfortable by that, but she knew that he was probably talking to her for the sake of their research funds as well.

Reinhardt had been very busy.

Even though he had been injured, he wouldn't have been able to study at all, not only because of the research fund problem but also because of her words that he should join their club meetings even while he was still walking on crutches.

So Harriet couldn't make fun of Reinhardt.

She felt guilty.

Harriet glanced at Reinhardt, who was just blankly staring at the blackboard.

Did he despair because he didn't expect his results to be so disastrous?

It's all because of me.

Everything's my fault.

Harriet really wanted to cry because it seemed like she had done something horrible without even realizing it.

* * *

After their common classes ended, Harriet went up to Reinhardt, who was trying to get his shaking body back to the dorm from their P.E. classes.

"Hey."

"Oh, right."

As she called him, it was Reinhardt who grabbed Harriet and told her something as if he had just remembered.

"Did I tell you yet? We might get more funds through the sponsorship meeting."

"Huh? Uhm… Yes. You roughly told us that this would solve our problem."

"Ah, yeah. Looks like I told you."

Reinhardt was distracted to the point that he seemed to have forgotten things he had already told her.

No, had he been that shocked by his midterm results?

“Anyway, don't worry about the research funds anymore. Although I don’t know how the sponsorship meeting will turn out, if it doesn’t work out, I’ll just find another way.”

Why?

She didn’t know why he was acting like that even though he wasn’t even a wizard and had only joined the Magic Research Society due to her pressure.

Then he told them to make some really ridiculous things, but in the end, it was he who was running around the most.

—Even while his body wasn’t in its best condition.

When she thought about it, Reinhardt had always been that way.

He was blunt, said things no one even wanted to hear, picked fights on purpose, and got annoyed easily.

However, whenever he was asked for help, he would always help. He didn’t even want anything in return. Harriet realized that she had received so many things from Reinhardt in such a short period of time.

During the first semester’s group mission, she tried persuading her dad, giving her relics, and creating a magic research group…

She felt like she just one-sidedly received his help.

Even then, he was trying to fulfill her unreasonable demand of getting more money from who-knows-where. He was even placed last on the midterm exam because of that.

What could she even say?

She wondered why he was doing all of that for her.

Harriet was looking at Reinhardt, who was standing in front of her, rambling on about the research fund problem.

“…What’s wrong?”

“Hic.”

She suddenly burst into tears.

“Wh-what’s the matter? Why are you crying all of a sudden? I didn’t do anything this time. Huh?”

Reinhardt shook his hands wildly, wondering what he’d done to make her cry out of the blue.

“I-I’m sorry…”

“Huuh?”

“I’m sorry. Because of me… You came in last all because of me…”





“Huuuuh?"

Reinhardt was evidently shocked when he saw Harriet burst into tears so suddenly.

“Just because of me you came in last… E-even lower than stupid Ludwig…”

“No, why are you crying because I got last? And why are you bringing up Ludwig?”

Reinhardt seemed incredulous, not understanding why Harriet was crying like that.

“Sob, sob, I… I made you do something weird… That’s why you went so far. I’m sorry. I won’t do it anymore. Hic… Sob…”

“Jeez, are you talking about when you told me to get more money?”

“Well… I didn’t know that you would actually do it…”

As soon as he figured out why she was crying, Reinhardt put his hand on her shoulder.

“What’s so important about some school grades? I don’t really care about things like that.”

Grades weren’t important…?

Then what was important to him?

Did that mean that the request she’d made was more important than his grades? Some request she made as a joke was more important than grades that would follow him for the rest of his life?

Harriet didn’t know how sincere Reinhardt was, so she could only guess at what his words meant.

She felt sad. However, while she felt sad, her heart seemed to be warming up, and a strange feeling she was feeling for the first time in her life seemed to fill it up.

“Hic! Sob! Sobsob…”

“Why are you crying even harder now? I already said it’s fine?!”

In the end, the things he said that were meant to stop her from crying made Harriet cry even harder, which troubled Reinhardt greatly.

Some of their classmates who were watching the scene from afar had expressions that seemed to say, *'Ah, that crazy guy has gone and made another kid cry.'*

CHAPTER 227

Ranked last in the midterms…

Everyone knew that it'd happened because of unavoidable circumstances. No, I mean, as long as I had normal common sense and was even just normal academically, I couldn't help but get better grades than Ludwig just by looking at my notes properly, you know?

What did they see me as?

Anyway, due to my circumstances, I was fortunate enough that people didn't think that I was an even bigger idiot than Ludwig.

I had earned some achievement points, and the consequences were rather small.

I was a bit flustered because Harriet suddenly burst into tears.

In the end, no matter what I had prepared or planned, the routine of Temple's curriculum passed the midterm exams.

It was time for the next step…

The group mission of the second semester.

After the group mission came the final exam, then the festival, and then our winter vacation.

A clash between the Orbis Class and the Royal Class had originally been scheduled during the festival, however, that event had completely disappeared. I wondered how the student council would fill the hole that the Orbis Class VS Royal Class competition, one of the festival's main events, left behind.

I hoped that it wasn't something that would inconvenience the Royal Class.

We had already received a notice from Mr. Epinhauser.

The first mission had been advantageous for those with excellent physical strength. However, not all missions were like that. It wasn't about being skilled in magic or combat, but it was more about how one utilized one's talent. Otherwise, guys like Louis Ancton, who was talented in academics, or Lanian Sessor, who had a talent in music, would just continue to be unable to stand out.

The first semester's mission was for those who were physically fit, were able to improvise, and liked to play active roles.

The second semester's mission was, therefore, advantageous for intelligent people.

'The theme for the group mission of the second semester is Reasoning.'

While they added this and that and interpreted it a little differently, it was just that.

A game of Mafia.

Similar to how I'd set up the first group mission on the deserted island as I watched "Law of the Jungle".

Well…

When I set the second mission up… Mafia had been very popular.

Every time I went through those things, I felt how uncreative I had been.

* * *

After the midterms, the group mission would be held for a week just like last time.

I had finally pretty much recovered that week as well.

"Are you fine now?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

“Can you start training again as well?”

"I don’t want to overdo it… But I should slowly start again.”

When I said that my body had returned to its original condition, Ellen started to ask me some questions.

That girl, did I see wrong, or were her eyes actually twinkling?

“…”

“What?”

"Let’s try strengthening ourselves with magical power a little, then.”

Ellen and I were taking lessons on Magic Body Strengthening from the Yoga Master, so then she asked me to use Magic Body Strengthening little by little during our training.

“…I’m sorry, but I haven’t gotten the hang of it just yet.”

“…Why?"

Ah, I hate you!

You're just too special. You know, I’m actually special now as well?!

Why are you treating me like I’m slow?

This is unbelievably fast for me, okay?! I was even recognized as the most talented student in Temple by Mr. Epinhauser, you hear?!

“When will you…?”

“…Trust me, I’m the one who wants the answer to that question more than anyone.”

Ellen seemed to contemplate what she could do while strengthening herself with magic as she sparred.

In the end, she was a teacher who cared a lot about her students.

I was so moved that I was about to cry, but sometimes, I felt majorly depressed because I was treated like something incredibly insignificant.

Anyway, I'd probably lost a lot of muscle because I had rested for far too long. I knew that the price I paid was really cheap considering that I gained a rough understanding of Magic Body Strengthening.

All of that happened because I'd forced myself to do something as absurd as Ellen while I wasn't even as talented as her. What Ellen and I had done wasn't something anyone should imitate.

Just being out of commission for a few weeks really was a mild consequence.

Anyway, after the group mission, I would have to spar with her again and undergo a lot more personal training.

While it was a game of mafia, it was still a group mission.

Of course, we wouldn't just sit around in a circle from start to finish as one would do in the actual game.

"Wow… What's this place?"

"It's creepy…"

"Rather, why is it snowing here at this time of year?"

"They didn't tell us to dress warmly for no reason, after all…"

-*Whooooosh…*

October…

Although the season had changed to fall, it wouldn't normally snow around that time.

We were in the northern regions ravaged by blizzards.

The ancient castle, Epiax.

We'd left the Imperial Capital and arrived before that dreary, snowed-in ancient castle, the site of the group mission.

A silent castle located in a snowy field… Rather than calling it beautiful, it seemed dilapidated, and it had a creepy atmosphere hanging over it. It seemed even creepier because it was snowing.

That was the place where we would hold the second semester's group mission.

So…

If one thought of summer, the sea came to mind.

And if one thought of winter, one would think of hot springs.

We were approaching the hot springs episode. Of course, it would only happen after the mission.

The main event was the mission.

[Event quest - Group Mission]

[Description : Don't be eliminated until the end of the mission.]

[Reward : 1000 Achievement Points]

The 1000-point reward was more than significant.

It was a group mission, after all.

To be honest, if our normal school life just continued, while I wouldn't have enjoyed it, I would have thought of it as just normal.

Quite frankly, I couldn't help but only think of all of it as a waste of time at that point.

I had only recovered to a certain extent at best, but I simply wanted to exercise and

train.

However, I had no intention of just throwing the mission—achievement points were at stake there.

I had to do my absolute best.

But you know what?

"Does everyone agree to execute Reinhardt?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yeah."

"Of course, I agree."

.

.

Didn't I secretly want something like that to happen?

Although the detailed conditions and some rules were slightly different, that group mission was basically a game of Mafia.

A mission to prove one's reasoning and logical thinking capabilities…

They tried to throw me out on the first day with no reasons or grounds for their decision.

* * *

Of course, it wasn't like I didn't protest.

We held a meeting in the castle on the first day right after we heard the explanation of the rules.

There was one mafia member for each class, so a total of two. Of course, they changed the name to ‘assassin’, but anyway, they were the mafia members.

Among 22 students, two were mafia members.

Even before things really started, everyone’s eyes were already on me.

…*Why are they looking at me?*

Everyone looked at me strangely.

There were many reasons, but in the end…

‘This is my first time doing something like this, but I think it would be good to eliminate any variables in this kind of situation, don’t you think?’

Those were Charlotte’s words.

'Well… That is true."

That was Bertus’s reaction.

‘I think it would be best in this situation where we severely lack information to identify the culprit by executing the person most likely to cause a mess.’

Everyone nodded at Charlotte’s words as if they had the same thoughts.

‘Certainly, Even as an ally, Reinhardt seems somewhat unstable.’

Everyone was convinced by Bertus and the A-Class’ response.

Those two were the mafia members for sure.

And as such, I had been executed.

The group mission—

[Event Quest failed]

—ended for me with an immediate elimination.

* * *

Of course, as it was a group mission, the rules were a little different from an actual game of mafia.

One assassin was designated for Class A and B respectively.

The assassins were a team—they would get the highest score regardless of which class they were from if they ended up winning.

We could not go outside the castle during the mission.

The mafia members could assassinate two people every night. Of course, they didn't just point at them to assassinate them like in the actual game.

Regardless of whether they just killed someone that passed by them, they had to go to the other person and declare that they killed the target as if 'sentencing' that person to death before leaving the scene.

The others had to examine the scene of the murder, check the alibi of their classmates, and figure out who'd seen the victim last; then they had to determine whose alibi was unclear for that time and what route they had taken.

By deducing those things, they could identify the culprit.

Once they had identified the perpetrators and gathered everyone's opinions, it was possible for them to discuss whether they should execute a certain person or not, and they could nominate one person from Class A and one from Class B.

The assassins had to kill two people a night, and the citizens could also execute two

people a day. Of course, the citizens weren't forced to execute anyone.

They wouldn't know whether who they'd executed was an assassin or not. Even if there was only one mafia member left, they could still kill two people a night.

The class that correctly identified and executed the perpetrator would get additional points. Of course, they would get negative points if innocent citizens were executed.

However, 'The discussion itself' was also included in the evaluation criteria. The more uncooperative one was, and the poorer choices that were made, the worse their evaluation would become.

It was important to showcase how logical one's reasoning was and how well they were able to identify the criminal—that was why the smart ones were at an advantage in that mission.

Anyway…

The group mission would end when either the mafia's or the citizens' victory had been confirmed.

After that, the teachers' evaluations would determine whether Class A or Class B won overall.

In the original, no one died during the first day's meeting, but I was executed immediately at that time.

The one who usually got executed on the first day during Mafia, especially under the premise that one knew the people one played with, was usually just someone everyone felt uncomfortable around or someone everyone was comfortable eliminating.

I was probably the former.

Even so, it was a group mission, but both Class A and Class B got together and executed me on the first day with no rhyme or reason.

That was all.

No one gave a shit.

Charlotte had immediately said that I should be executed.

Even Harriet and Ellen had agreed.

It seemed certain that everyone thought it would be more advantageous to just execute me immediately and that they would have less to worry about then.

"Teacher, isn't this just completely absurd?"

As soon as my execution had concluded, I was summoned to an area outside of the mission area with a recall artifact similar to the one from the deserted island. I immediately started complaining to Mr. Epinhauser.

Mr. Mustrang looked at me with pity.

"It was simply a wise choice made by your classmates."

"Was it?"

Mr. Epinhauser seemed to just take it as the natural flow of things.

No! I was innocent, right?! How is executing an innocent citizen helping the others?!

"Because you might've taken actions outside the scope of the mission, they probably wanted to avoid confusion."

If no one agreed with my opinions, I might've resorted to swearing or maybe beating someone up, so they'd banished me first because they didn't want to worry about what I might do later.

Right…

If they didn't agree with me, I might've actually gone, 'Ya bastards! I'm right here,' and then lightly smack some of them.

Whether they were citizens or mafia, it was only right to kill me off first…

I was an innocent citizen, but I wasn't an innocent classmate.

That was why they'd executed me. Despite there being no real basis for them to do it at that time, they'd still seen it as the right decision.

They were just getting rid of an unstable variable.

Both Charlotte and Bertus had made the right decision.

So did that mean that they weren't the two mafia members?

"So who are the mafia members?"

"Mafia? What do you mean?"

"N-no, I mean, the assassins. Yeah, the assassins."

Urg…

I had cold sweat running down my back because of my stupid mouth.

Mr. Epinhauser calmly opened his mouth as if it didn't matter if he told the guy who had already been eliminated.

"Number A-1, and Number B-1…"

Goddamnit.

I was right about those two.

A collaboration between the two narrow-eyed characters who were really good at managing their image would get very serious when competitions were involved and were incredibly smart.

Oh well, at least I knew that the other citizens were going to lose as well.

* * *

In the original, it was Bertus and Dettomolian who were the mafia members.

It was a pretty hard combination to picture working together.

The original condition of Mafia was that both the citizens and mafia members had equal chances, but in my version, they were a bit unequal.

If even one of the assassins was still alive by the time of the last meeting on the fifth day, the mafia would win.

How many of the mafia members survived didn't matter.

In the original, Bertus had even assassinated himself to cause greater confusion, leaving behind some instructions for Dettomolian.

Of course, one might think that it would be possible for the mafia members to not assassinate anyone, but that was made impossible by the rule that they had to pick two targets every night.

While the process was pretty complicated, that idiot Ludwig had eventually managed to uncover the identity of the Mafia members.

Actually, the reason Ludwig survived until the end was because he was stupid.

It was the exact opposite of me.

If I got executed because they thought that I was a ticking time bomb, Ludwig was treated like an idiot that was harmless to both citizens and the mafia.

Since it was clear that the mafia members were incredibly smart, Ludwig couldn't be one, so he wasn't suspected at all.

All his lines of reasoning were wrong and served well to confuse the others, so it was better for the mafia members to keep him alive.

That was how he almost survived until the end. However, the storyline was more about how Ludwig had uncovered the identity of the assassin after monitoring everyone in any way he could through his grit rather than figuring it out through reasoning.

I looked forward to seeing how it would turn out this time.

The Bertus-Dettomolian combination had changed to the Bertus-Charlotte combination.

Since the two of them had a rather bad relationship, things might end up rather dirty

Anyway, with how things were developing, they would assassinate the smart ones first.

Like in the original, it would be Harriet and Louis Ankton who would get killed on the first day.

As I had been eliminated immediately, the event quest had ended in failure.

1000 points…

It was a shame that I couldn't get them, but I didn't think I would have survived for that long anyway if I wasn't executed like that. When I thought about it more, it was a pretty natural choice to execute me immediately because of the actions I had shown them up to that point.

It was actually a battle of wits completely disregarding one's physical skills, so I wouldn't have been able to stop the assassins with a sword or anything.

Anyway, until the mission was over, time was slipping through my fingers. It was hard just sitting around like that.

"Can't I go back to Temple?"

"You can't."

I wanted to do some personal training at Temple, but it seemed like I couldn't. After all, all of the Royal Class was currently in the middle of a group mission, so the place was completely empty, regardless of grade.

During the uninhabited island mission last time, after the mission was over, we were able to hang out and eat our fill in a well-organized vacation resort-like environment filled with bungalows.

However, for the second time, the environment wasn't as great because the place was just completely filled with snow.

The ancient castle Epiax was located in a frigid snowfield.

I was in a mansion located somewhere in its vicinity. Of course, the ancient castle had such a spooky atmosphere that it made people shudder, however, the place I was in wasn't like that.

As I'd set up the group missions to be like field trips under the guise of missions, the mansion actually had a hot spring.

Although it wasn't that grand, there was also a training room and some staff that would prepare our meals.

That night…

"…What?"

"…I got eliminated."

Ellen was summoned to the mansion.

CHAPTER 228

Two during a trial…

Two during the night…

That was the maximum of kills each day.

No one was supposed to get executed in the first trial, and yet I'd ended up getting executed.

The mafia members could assassinate two people each night, so two of my classmates had to get eliminated on the first day at night.

However, a development different from the original took place once again.

Ellen, not Harriet, had become one of the victims on the first night.

"Wh-what the… Bertus is…"

And shortly after, Louis Ankton of Class B was summoned to where I was, a depressed look on his face.

Ellen and Louis were the ones eliminated on the first day.

Things were still pretty much on schedule.

They were eliminating the smart ones first; Ellen was certainly smart.

"D-doesn't that mean that our grades will be bad?"

Louis seemed to be worried about his poor performance that time around.

"Louis, you don't have to worry about that because our grades will be determined by combining Class A's and B's performance, unless the assassins win."

"Ah, yes, is that so?"

“Yeah.”

Mr. Mustrang came around to visit and reassured Louis, telling him that he didn’t have to worry about his grades being determined by what order one got eliminated in.

Likewise, Mr. Epinhasuer came around to visit us as well.

Ellen, to be exact.

“Number two, you failed. You know the reason, right?”

“Yes.”

After Mr. Epinhauser said those words in a calm manner, he left again.

She’d failed…

Those words left both me and Louis Ankton perplexed.

What?

Why did she fail? Doesn’t the order in which the students are eliminated not matter?

But of course, Ellen reacted as if she knew what’d happened.

“What did he mean? You failed?"

When I asked her that, Ellen answered after picking up one of the cookies placed on the table.

“I just asked one of the assassins to kill me.”

What?

Ellen had already identified the identity of the mafia members on the first day, and it seemed like she’d just gone up to them and asked them to kill her.

“No, but why?”

If she'd figured out the identity of the mafia, she could've just followed the rules of the mission. She'd ended up dying because she'd gone up to them after finding out who they were and asked them to kill her.

Why the hell did she do something like that?

Ellen glanced at me after hearing my question.

"You're all better."

"…What does that have to do with anything?"

"Let's train."

No.

No, seriously.

She didn't seem like it, but she seriously had a talent for changing the subject.

* * *

Ellen and I sat on a terrace of the mansion and drank some tea while eating cookies.

Louis seemed to have been really tired, so he'd just gone to one of the empty rooms to sleep.

I didn't know how, but Ellen had actually managed to figure out the identities of the assassins. Maybe she'd got a clue from them trying to get me executed so adamentally.

Anyway, I believed that Ellen just wanted to get eliminated quickly to train with me the rest of the time rather than completing the mission by identifying the assassins.

That was probably why Mr. Epinhauser said that she'd failed—because she dropped out on purpose.

No…

But if that was the case, wouldn't it have been better to just reveal the identity of the

assassins at the next day's meeting and quickly finish the mission?

That way, we could have returned to Temple a whole lot earlier.

Of course, we could just hang out in that mansion, but if the mission concluded, all of us could have returned.

"Why did you drop out? You could have just finished the mission quickly. We could have gone back to Temple then, you know?"

"I suppose so."

Ellen fiddled with her cup of tea, gazing at the snowy scenery stretching out beyond the terrace window.

That, too, could be called a breathtaking scene.

The snowy garden was shining brightly in the moonlight, even though it was night.

Ellen obviously knew that if she'd finished the mission early, we could've go back to Temple together. Temple was a much better environment to train in than that place.

Ellen didn't look at me.

"You'll be busy in Temple."

"..."

She continued to speak without turning her head.

"You'll be so busy you won't have time to train."

She thought that I would be preoccupied with something else when I went back to Temple, not caring about training. Although I had become unable to train due to my injuries, she seemed to think that there wouldn't be any difference when I had become able to train again.

She thought that I wouldn't train with her anymore in Temple because I had so much work to do.

Ellen chose to voluntarily drop out to make time for us rather than make us quickly return to Temple by finishing up the mission.

Until the mission was over…

We were able to train together.

There was no reason for Ellen to do something like that though.

She had no reason to pay so much attention to my personal training. As the gap between us was still very big, Ellen wouldn't be able to gain anything from training with me.

She was so hung up about it for apparently no reason.

I didn't have much to say to that.

"Did you feel sad?"

"…"

Ellen took a sip of her black tea, which she usually didn't drink, before she fiddled with her cup again. She was still looking at the pale white snow field, not facing me.

"A little…"

Even though she knew that it wasn't something that could be helped, Ellen still felt sad.

"Aren't I strange?"

She felt sad when she actually had no proper reason to feel sad.

Even Ellen herself felt that she was acting strange.

"No, being human in general is strange to begin with."

That was all I could say. Ellen smiled at my words, soaked in the soft moonlight as she opened her mouth once more.

“True.”

Ellen was the most beautiful drenched in moonlight, perhaps because she possessed the Moon Goddess’s Sword.

It was hard to even look at her properly.

“Because you are very strange as well.”

That might or might not have sounded like criticism…

* * *

It was midnight, so I wanted to get some training in, which was why Ellen and I entered the indoor gym after a short tea break.

I didn’t have to do it, but there was no reason why I shouldn’t.

I could still see the snow falling outside of the gym’s window.

It seemed like Ellen had been able to pinpoint the assassins straight away, but I still wondered how she’d managed to figure it out.

“How did you know who the culprits were right away?”

“Well…”

Ellen seemed troubled.

“You have the greatest influence over our classmates.”

Ellen didn’t usually talk much, but that didn’t mean that she couldn’t. She knew how to speak coherently—just like she did in the Darklands.

My influence was the highest…

While it was quite shameful for me to say it myself, it was true. Although I wasn’t really close with either the Class A or B students, I had a lot of connections, and because of the founding of the Magic Research Society, three of the B Class students had entered my sphere of influence as well.

“If I was one of the assassins, I would deal with you first.”

“…Erm, I know you’re talking about the mission, but isn’t it a bit terrifying putting it like that?”

What did she mean with “deal with me”?

Actually, if she ever tried to, I wouldn’t be able to do anything against it—I would just be cut into tiny pieces.

“But what does me being their first target have to do with catching the culprits?”

“If you hadn’t been executed during the meeting, you would have been assassinated on the first night; then they would have nominated another influential person as the assassin.”

“…I see.”

Unless I was actually constantly going around with another person, they would have tried to assassinate me.

There were detailed missions, so at some point, I would have ended up alone.

“First, their number one target, you, got executed at the meeting, after that, they would aim for the next target.”

“Oh… You’re right.”

“I believed that there were a total of four candidates that could’ve become their victims on the first night: Bertus, Charlotte, Louis Ankton, and Harriet.”

Those who were smart beyond comparison… Two of those four would be the first victims.

“However, there was also a possibility that the assassins were among those four. If I shadowed one of them who absolutely couldn’t be an assassin, they would show up sooner or later.”

In fact, Bertus and Charlotte were the chosen assassins.

“Harriet absolutely couldn’t be the assassin.”

“…Why?”

“…If she were one of the assassins, she would have liked the situation, but she didn’t really seem happy at all.”

Did she?

In the end, I had been executed unanimously, but it’d happened so quickly that I had no time to check how each of the students had reacted.

No, if that was the case, she should have defended me.

…No, actually, she would have rather choked herself than say something like, “You can’t just kill Reinhardt because of his personality!” in front of all the other students.

“So I was hiding near Harriet’s private room and found Charlotte. That’s it.”

The assassins were different people, but the development was similar to the original story.

The first night’s victims were supposed to be Harriet and Louis Ankton…

However, unlike the original, Ellen actually wanted to give up on the mission, so she’d found one of the assassins by waiting near one of the likely victims and asking them to just kill her, not the person they originally intended to kill.

She didn’t immediately identify Charlotte as an assassin, Ellen had just thought about what she would do if she were one.

Of course, she could have thought about it from a different angle and started of with the stupid kids (Ludwig) as well.

“The other assassin might be Bertus.”

* * *

I’d found out by asking the teachers, but as soon as Ellen had found out that Charlotte was one of the culprits, she seemed to have inferred that Bertus was also

one.

So she didn't even have to ask because she already knew the answer.

"Why do you think so?"

"Just some reverse inference because I found out that Charlotte was one of the assassins. She was also the first one to bring up the idea of executing you at the meeting as well, and Bertus reacted the most to it."

Knowing who the culprits were would reveal the reasons for their previous actions.

As an assassin, the first thing they would want to do is get rid of me.

That was why Charlotte had said what she said, albeit in a more casual way, and Bertus had responded accordingly.

In the original, Ellen had gotten assassinated while she was half-heartedly participating.

She didn't actually want to win, but she'd reached the truth right away after becoming serious about quickly dropping out of the mission.

She'd worked so hard just because she'd wanted to drop out.

What a weird girl.

* * *

Ellen and I had a sparring match again after quite a long time in the mansion near the old castle Epiax. It had an indoor training room.

It wasn't as good as Temple's, but ultimately, as long as we had training swords and some space, we could train. Training as a combat major was the most cost-effective.

No, I actually wondered if there was even any other major with such poor cost-efficiency as the magic major.

It had been a long time since I had a sparring match.

-Kaaang! Kagak!

“Urgh!"

“Are you okay? Are you still injured?”

Ellen spoke anxiously as she helped me up when I landed on the floor.

“…Should we not do this?”

She seemed to feel slightly depressed as she said that. She didn’t want me to force myself if I hadn’t been completely cured yet.

The first thing I realized…

“It’s not that I’m still in pain, my body just feels kind of stiff.”

The problem wasn’t that I hadn’t been completely cured and still felt pain, but because I’d rested for a bit. my body felt kind of rusty as I held the training sword. It looked like the first thing I had to restore was my flexibility before anything else.

“And while I don’t think I can judge…”

The second thing I realized…

“Something about you changed compared to before.”

“Something?”

“You’ve grown a lot.”

I could feel that Ellen’s skills had vastly improved while I had been resting. I could feel it just by looking at her.

She wasn’t playing around while I couldn’t train. I could clearly feel that Ellen was further ahead of me than before. It wasn’t just a matter of her knowing Magic Body Strengthening but her skills in themselves.

Even if I lived twice as long as her, it was a gap that couldn’t be closed.

—It had become even wider.

I knew that she was a wall that I wouldn't be able to overcome for the rest of my life, but actually, nothing would really change if she improved even further.

It kind of made me feel like crying for no real reason.

"Did I?"

Ellen tilted her head as if she didn't know anything about that.

Still, Ellen seemed to be quite happy when she heard that I wasn't that way because I was still in pain but because my body wasn't fully warmed up.

I mean, it was kind of weird.

Some might think that Ellen always looked neutral.

The only way one could find out how she really felt was by observing her subtle reactions like I did.

It wasn't like she didn't have any reactions to matters at all, but they were just very small.

When she ate something delicious, she wouldn't act like Harriet going, "Oooh! It's delicious!" but she would blink her eyes a few times and stare at what she ate just then.

When she felt grumpy, she would pout her lips a little bit.

When she was sad, she would keep her eyes slightly lowered, staring into empty space.

Sometimes, when she was really angry, she would even shout.

I had learned a lot about Ellen Artorius.

"Then let's start again."

"Yes, come at me."

-Kaang!

I felt like I'd actually learned too much about her.

* * *

"Let's call it a day."

"Huff… Yeah…"

After our midnight spar, I felt more exhausted and tired than usual.

I hadn't even rested that long, but I felt that my body's tension had dropped a lot, which was why I couldn't hold on as long as I usually did.

Ellen sat next to me in a chair placed on one side of the gym.

I had become exhausted a lot faster than before while Ellen didn't even work up a drop of sweat.

She didn't have as much stamina as Ludwig, but she still had a lot.

I was tired, and it was late at night, so I felt like I was about to fall asleep.

It wasn't winter yet, but we were far in the north, and there were also some hot springs there…

There was no reason not to use them.

There was an open-air hot spring outside of the mansion, and inside of it, there was also an indoor hot spring.

Of course, there were separate baths for men and women. It was still snowing outside, but I decided to enter the open-air bath.

-Whoooosh…

While it was an open-air bath, it wasn't entirely in the open—outer walls made of wood surrounded it.

After the mafia game was over, there would be a common clichéed event taking place there. Well, it was just a small filler, so it didn't really affect the main story.

Anyway, I was the first to use that facility since I was the first to be eliminated.

There were wooden exterior walls, and beyond them on the right side was another open-air bath, also known as the women's bath.

However, the wall was actually pretty low…

Just by putting some more strength into one's legs, one could reach the edge of it, grab it and jump over.

I had no intentions of doing that, though.

"It's freezing cold."

I just wanted to enter the indoor hot spring, but I'd wondered how long I would hold out in the snowy open-air hot spring, so I'd gone there instead.

When I thought of it, I didn't think I ever liked to slowly soak in hot baths or something before.

"Oooh."

I felt like my whole body was loosening up because I'd entered after I had been beaten quite badly

I felt like my face was going to freeze up, but honestly, it wasn't enough to actually make a fuss about it.

I had gotten pretty much used to pain already.

Absent-mindedly sitting in the hot spring, I looked at the snowy night sky.

-Click

Sounds of a door opening could be heard coming from behind the wall on my right.

-Crunch, crunch

I could also hear the sounds of bare feet stepping on snow. Since it was an outdoor bath, snow had piled up all around the hot spring.

I believed that Ellen had entered the hot spring because she couldn't sleep.

-Reinhardt, are you there?

No.

Why was she calling me in that situation?

I was actually holding my breath!

I don't even know why I went through that trouble though.

"Yeah."

-Aren't you cold?

"I am."

-If you are, why did you decide to bathe outside? There's an indoor bath as well, you know?

"Then why are you here?"

-Just because.

"Same for me."

The low sound of Ellen dipping herself into the bath echoed over to my side.

Damnit.

I didn't want to think about those things, but I couldn't think of anything else.

Whatever. I'll just go out in a bit.

-Reinhardt…

Why did she keep talking to me? I felt weird talking to her with that wall between us while in the states we were in!

She had to know that she had quite the knack for putting people in uncomfortable situations while pretending not to know anything, right? If she didn't, that would be just weird!

"What?"

My brain was thrown into disarray, but my response came out rather naturally.

-Do you like snow?

"Well…"

I couldn't even remember the last time I'd felt like I liked or disliked snow.

I guess I neither liked or disliked it.

That being said, I'd just gone out to the open-air bath for no reason whatsoever. I sat there in a daze under the snowy night sky despite the chilling cold.

"I guess I like it."

I'd gone out to the open-air bath despite the inconvenience. Maybe I really just wanted to see that snowy scenery.

Therefore, I thought that I probably liked snow.

That was how I felt.

So what about Ellen? She had said that she didn't like rain—it would remind her of the day her brother left her.

-I like it, too.

That was what Ellen said.

Just as I had gone to the open-air bath disregarding the inconvenience the cold posed, Ellen seemed to have come there for the same reason.

She liked it, too.

That answer.

It seriously…

Felt quite bittersweet.

-Let's make a snowman tomorrow.

Why a snowman all of a sudden?

Those random things she said from time to time really made me feel weird. First, she'd suddenly told me to train with her, then, she'd suddenly asked me to make a snowman with her, forgetting about training.

It was especially weird coming out of Ellen's mouth. I would have never imagined that she would ever ask me to do something like that with her.

"Sure."

However, as expected, the answer to her question naturally left my mouth.

CHAPTER 229

The next morning…

There were only three people that had gotten teleported to the mansion, including Ellen and Louis.

“So, additionally, what we would need is Granite and Ellium… No, but where the hell are we supposed to store these things we need tons of? Do we have such a space? And even if we did, how are we going to transport that stuff?”

“I discovered last time that there’s a large warehouse for clubs within Temple. We could rent a part of them—that’s what all the big clubs do. Of course, it wouldn’t cost us anything since the rental application has already been completed, you can think of there already being enough storage space.”

“Really? Then what about the transportation of the materials?”

“The warehouse staff will take care of that.”

“Wow… Temple sure is great.”

“Yeah, I honestly didn’t know that they would even support us in this regard.”

Louis Ankton and I were talking about matters concerning the Magic Research Society. Other than being smart, that guy was also quite meticulous in his own way, wasn’t he?

Since we had created a club and were running it, it seemed like we should find out in what ways Temple would support us and make use of it accordingly.

"What a smart bastard. Well done, mom."

“…Erm, could you maybe not praise me in that way?”

After Louis said so, as if seeming stunned, I twisted my lips slightly.

“I was born with that mouth, so what do you want me to do about it?”

“I think… I’m starting to understand what kind of guy you are now…”

Louis seemed to take me as some kind of weird-tempered, dirty idiot, someone he didn’t need to be afraid of. That was probably why that guy’s true character, his sharp-tongued, rude character, surfaced quite often.

Louis was helping me with the details of the club that I wouldn’t have cared about if I was on my own. I was good at getting things done, but I sure wasn’t good at fixing things up.

He was actually more like a vice-president than a secretary.

It was just a club with six members, but…

No, but our budget was more than five billion won, you know?

That was pretty amazing, wasn’t it?

Ellen started staring at me the moment I started talking to Louis about those matters since breakfast.

She didn’t say anything.

However, she emitted a type of silent pressure.

Alright… Alright, I got it already!

I won’t talk about this here!

No, but it was Louis who started talking first…

Anyway…

If the mafia members weren’t caught, the group mission would last until Friday evening.

After that, we would rest in the mansion until Sunday and return to Temple.

Ellen had asked me to train with her for the remaining time, but we got our coats and went out of the mansion that day.

The mansion stood in a snowy forest. While it wasn't a blizzard, there was still snow falling from the sky, and although the snow had been roughly cleared away near the mansion, there was still a lot of snow piled up around the edges.

Ellen squatted down and clumped some snow together into a snowball with her gloved hands.

Then she rolled it around on the floor.

"You do it, too."

"…Okay."

I didn't think she would actually do it.

No, I thought she definitely wouldn't do it.

She actually did something she usually wouldn't. Ellen, wearing a thick coat, made a snowball and added more to it with her gloved hands.

I didn't know what to think of that.

She was so cute.

Although she was supposed to be far from cute, she had been acting quite cute those days.

The strongest character in this world: "Let's make a snowman."

It was cute, so I thought it would be fine.

Suddenly, both I and Ellen were rolling that snowball.

If someone saw me like that, it would seriously damage Reinhardt's dignity.

However, I thought that if I started to pay attention to such banal things, that would mean that things had already gone awry, so I just focused on making the snowball

even more.





There was quite a bit of snow around, so Ellen and I were able to create quite a large snowball in no time.

“Move.”

Ellen picked up another big snowball and put it on the snowball I was rolling around. Every time I saw that slender girl muster up so much strength, I slightly flinched. It was about time that I got used to it.

She said that we should make a snowman like it would take longer, but wasn’t that the end of it?

We finished it pretty quickly.

However, that wasn’t the end for Ellen. She began to pat the snowballs with her long fingers.

“…What are you doing?”

“I’m making the snowman now.”

“What more are you going to add? You already made a snowman.”

You’d have a snowman after stacking two snowballs. However, Ellen just tilted her head as she looked at me.

“How is this a snowman?"

Just what the hell is a snowman in this girl’s eyes?

I was staring blankly at Ellen, who’d started sculpting the snowballs by patting them.

“Come and get more snow.”

Ellen asked me to make more snowballs, not wanting me to just stand around either.

* * *

If what I thought a snowman would be was a cabin, then Ellen thought of a snowman as a palace.

I knew that one of her highest stats was dexterity, but seeing her use it to make a snowman made me feel really weird.

"No, how could you make it look like a real person?"

"This is a snowman."

That wasn't just a snowman, it was more like a snowhuman, right?

Snowhuman? Was there even such a thing?

Anyway, Ellen shaved off snow from the two snowballs by wildly patting them, shaping them into a human-like form.

The snowballs I had formed were used for additions.

Watching Ellen use her talents for something completely useless made a weird, hard-to-describe feeling bubble up inside of me.

After she was done, Ellen moved a bit further away from the snowman and nodded her head as if she was satisfied with what she saw.

A snowhuman…

"Perhaps… is that me?"

"Yes."

Because of the limitations of the material she'd used, the snowman wasn't a perfect copy of me, but the face looked pretty similar to mine. I didn't even know if I should use the word 'wearing', but it seemed as if it was wearing the same Royal Class uniform I wore.

It completely looked like me, standing with a slightly crooked posture, arms crossed, and a cocky expression on its face.

She'd even formed the shape of my hair and the wrinkles in the school uniform and pants.

However, it was still snowing in the end. It would slowly accumulate on its head,

gradually ruining its shape.

Ellen seemed to be so excited about all of it that she even brought a large umbrella from somewhere and fixed it in a way that it would cover the snowman.

In the end, contrary to what I first thought, we spent hours building this snowman outside. Ellen worked with her bare hands because she wouldn't have been able to make such an elaborate snowman with her gloves on.

So her hands were completely red.

Her face also seemed shriveled up from the cold.

"Aren't you cold?"

"I'm not."

"Girl, your nose is leaking."

"…"

* * *

Ellen wildly covered her nose at my words and then glared at me.

"It isn't."

She realized in just a moment that I'd lied about her nose dripping, which made her glare at me even harder.

"Sure, it isn't leaking, and you aren't cold, whatever. Let's just go inside first."

I grabbed Ellen's hand; it felt almost as cold as ice.

"If you get frostbite like this, we'll have to chop your hands off."

"…"

Ellen didn't refuse when I led her away.

Was it because it was cold?

It seemed like she was trembling a bit.

* * *

Back at the mansion, Ellen drank some warm tea. Her face was flushed red as she sipped it. She was still watching the snowy landscape and the snowman standing there with an umbrella covering it visible through the window.

There were some people who came to look at the snowman Ellen had made, seeming curious.

"Do you usually make snowmen like that?”

It seemed unbelievable that a girl like her would make a snowman, no, a snowhuman. It didn’t seem like her first time, either. She just kept still and looked out of the window.

“Sometimes I did… with my brother."

As expected, it was like that.

She never just made them on her own but had actually made them with her brother. I could imagine Ellen and her brother making a human out of snow on snowy days.

Ellen when she was still very young…

I wondered what she looked like.

I couldn’t quite imagine that. I mean, if you asked me, she was still very young even then.

So I just imagined Ellen but smaller.

Ellen Artorius, a younger version with a rounder face.

I thought that would have been incredibly cute. Were there maybe pictures of that?

“It's been a long time since I last made one. "

She became sad whenever she thought of her brother. However, when she was with me, she would freely talk about him.

She built a snowman with me that day, something she'd done a long time ago with her brother. I'd also never thought that I would end up making a snowman at my age, so it felt pretty fresh.

Ellen said she liked snow.

At the same time, she hated rain because her brother left her on a rainy day.

She seemed to associate snow with positive memories of her brother.

"I wonder what the others are doing."

I suddenly wondered how the group mission was progressing. I was curious how the plan of those incredibly intelligent guys was going.

Because those two weren't on good terms, it could be that their opinions might conflict. Rather, there might be a possibility that they would try to work against each other.

"How do you think the results of the mission will turn out?"

I posed a question to Ellen, who was looking out of the window.

"I hope it won't end too quickly."

I asked her how it would end, but she gave me a completely irrelevant answer, and then she opened her eyes wide as if she had just realized what she had said.

It was like she didn't expect to say those words even though she said them with her own mouth.

Even if it ended early, we would still be able to stay there. We didn't necessarily have to immediately return to Temple.

And yet Ellen said that she didn't want the mission to end early.

Just what did she mean by that?

* * *

That day, during dinner.

“…Why are you here?"

“Well… I was executed."

Harriet had been eliminated and summoned to the mansion.

Ellen was staring straight at her.

* * *

Harriet felt uneasy.

It wasn’t because of the atmosphere surrounding the ancient castle Epiax, which was eerie, gloomy, and cold.

Even though she was in the middle of a mission, she wasn’t worried about getting a bad grade either.

Nor was she afraid of getting assassinated.

The day before, Ellen and Louis Ancton were assassinated. Reinhardt had been eliminated during the first trial due to a half-joking and half-ill-intentioned prank by their classmates.

During the deserted island mission last time, she’d found out that those that dropped out or got eliminated had been relaxing in a resort outside of the mission area. It would probably be the same that time as well.

Only Reinhardt, Ellen, and Louis had been teleported to the outer areas as of then.

That…

Made her feel anxious.

She had no reason to feel anxious about that, and yet she did. She was nervous and uneasy because she somehow felt like she had been deprived of something.

Adelia, who was with her, was incredibly worried about her and tried to comfort her. She also knew that Ellen and Reinhardt were really close with each other.

It wasn't like it was anything new that they were alone together. There was no reason for her to worry about that. It had always been like that up until then. Didn't they even go on a long trip together not too long ago?

But…

No more…

She didn't think that she could overlook it anymore.

While it hadn't been just a day or two that they had been alone together before, however, if one more day and then another gets added to that time, the relationship between them might become even closer than it already was.

She was scared of that.

Ellen was a good friend of hers.

A very good friend.

She didn't hate her, and she didn't want to hate her. She had no reason to, either.

However, she hated seeing her together with Reinhardt.

She didn't like it, but every time Harriet caught herself thinking like that, she felt miserable for feeling that way about a dear friend of hers. That feeling was so close to impulse that she couldn't control it.

She didn't want to dislike her.

However, just thinking about what those two might be doing made that ugly, unpleasant impulse dominate her emotions.

It was so obvious that they cared about each other. She couldn't deny that fact, so she felt even more miserable and shabby trying to squeeze herself between them.

She wanted to spend just a bit more time with Reinhardt to the point that she'd

forced him, who wasn't even a wizard, to be part of the Magic Research Society and even made him the president.

It was just too…

Pathetic.

Just how was she any different from a little kid throwing a tantrum?

She'd begged him to look at her and spend more time with her, and Reinhardt had listened.

Ellen had granted Reinhardt endless amounts of help. It was no exaggeration to say that Ellen had created the Reinhardt they knew.

All she could do was throw tantrums and receive help from Reinhardt, even though he had no reason to, while she couldn't do a single thing for him.

She felt inferior.

She wanted to be someone of use to her precious someone, but it just wasn't something she could achieve.

She couldn't stop their relationship from deepening.

So Harriet couldn't hide her anxiousness when Ellen and Reinhardt had both been teleported to the outer mission area.

They had already accumulated a lot of alone time with each other, so she was absolutely aware that she couldn't stop it from happening.

She also knew that she had no right to stop them.

It was just a vague insecurity that gave Harriet some trouble.

She didn't want to lose Ellen, but there were times when she thought that it would be for the better if she did.

If she hadn't been friends with her…

Then she could have nurtured her love for Reinhardt with a lighter heart.

Just liking him wouldn't have made her feel so incredibly guilty.

Harriet held the greatest contempt for herself for thinking that way.

Those days, she felt even more just what an ugly person she was.

Just as Ellen was in pain…

She was in pain as well.

So she couldn’t concentrate on anything at the moment.

It was time for the next meeting.

She couldn’t even concentrate on discussing who the assassin could be. That, everything. just didn’t really matter.

I want to drop out.

I want to quickly leave as well.

I want to be sent outside.

—That was what Harriet wanted.

“Harriet, why are you so nervous?”

Bertus looked at Harriet, who was unable to mask her anxiety, with a soft smile.

It was just a soft smile, nothing more, but anyone who saw it would immediately know the true meaning behind Bertus’s expression.

“Right. You really do look anxious.”

For example, Charlotte de Gardias responded to his statement with a similar expression.

The look in those two’s eyes.

It was soft and yet seemed to carry some hidden subtlety.

“My, aren’t you acting just like someone who has something to hide?”

Those were the eyes of a predator having found its prey.

“A-ah… Th-that’s. I-It’s-! Wh-what would I even have to hide!”

Harriet de Saint-Owan tried to act for the first time in her life.

She tried to act flustered.

It was her chance.

CHAPTER 230

Charlotte de Gardias felt strange.

“W-well, I mean. I guess I went to sleep, but erm… I don’t really remember.”

Was she stupid?

Someone who was able to study magic being that stupid made no sense.

Harriet was by no means an idiot.

However, they could clearly see that she was anxious, so they wondered why she acted so stupid, however, although she responded a little bit when Bertus decided to push her a bit, all that came out was basically gibberish.

The previous night, Louis Ankton and Ellen Artorius had been assassinated. When asked where she’d been and what she’d been doing at that time, she’d only answered that she was sleeping in her private room, but she wasn’t even that sure about that and that she didn’t really remember. That might’ve been the case because she was really nervous and confused.

She even used suspicious words to hide behind.

“Can anyone testify to your alibi last night?”

“W-well… I don’t think so…”

“Harriet, you had tea with me until late at night.”

“D-d-did I?!”

A girl who wasn’t an idiot was acting like one.

Just what was wrong with her?

She was too young to already be suffering from dementia.

Charlotte already felt quite troubled.

She had a good start because she had easily gotten rid of Reinhardt, who was the biggest obstacle to the mission and the most annoying to deal with, using the preconceptions everyone had of him.

However, in the end, she still felt uncomfortable with sharing her victory with Bertus if she wanted to be the mission's victor.

Once she had been given the task to win, she had to win no matter what.

—That was the way Charlotte had lived—the same way Bertus had.

So she was able to make some infinitely cold-headed judgments in that situation.

Reinhardt was the biggest stumbling stone, so she had to remove him from the start to succeed.

That night, she had decided to deal with Harriet de Saint-Owan and Louis Ankton, thinking that she should deal with the smart students next.

Harriet wasn't only smart, but also a member of the new club called the Magic Research Society, and she was also well-liked. It was safe to say that she was the one who had the most influence on her classmates after Reinhardt.

Bertus had made the proposal and Charlotte had been in charge of the implementation.

But then…

'Kill me.'

"…Huh?"

She'd thought that she was moving around secretly while no one was looking, but then she was actually caught by someone from behind before she even knew it.

Ellen Artorius.

'You're one of the assassins. Just kill me.'

‘I-I don’t know what you mean? I was just looking for someone to spend the night with. It’s kind of uncomfortable being alone here.’

‘Just kill me, I know you’re here to kill Harriet.’

As if trying to tell her not to use some lame excuses that wouldn’t work, Ellen read her behavior and asked her to kill her.

She had been completely read.

And she didn’t even know what her opponent was after, but it seemed like she just wanted to get eliminated from the mission.

Just with that, Charlotte already felt a certain sense of defeat and discomfort.

‘…Sure, I’ll assassinate you.'

-*Pa!*

The recall artifact was triggered immediately, and Ellen disappeared from where she stood. Charlotte felt incredibly annoyed that she had been read and that she couldn’t understand Ellen’s intentions.

She seemed to not be interested in anything. It felt unpleasant.

It looked like someone who did their best in something they didn’t even really care about.

It wasn’t funny.

She felt like she had already lost before she’d even really started, but she couldn’t give up.

Because of that, the target she was to get rid of because they were smart had survived, which would cause suspicion.

They should have just decided to go for Ellen, not her.

It was a misjudgment. Of course, it was Bertus’s suggestion, though.

In the end, the next target they'd wanted to get rid of after Reinhardt, had practically begged to get eliminated.

However, Charlotte already felt rather unhappy because she couldn't predict Ellen's actions.

"W-well… It seems like I do have an alibi after all… No, I mean… Th-that couldn't be! No way!"

Watching Harriet de Saint-Owan crawl into the trap on her own left Charlotte dispirited.

That girl, who absolutely wasn't that foolish, acted like a complete fool.

There had to be a reason for that stupidity, then.

At that rate, she would get executed.

If the result of her stupid actions was her execution, then her purpose had to be said execution.

She wanted to get executed…

She slowly started to figure out what was going on.

Ellen and Harriet…

Neither of them seemed to have much interest in the mission.

'Just how much do those two like Reinhardt?'

She was getting annoyed.

They'd gotten rid of him because they were scared of Reinhardt's incredible influence.

That was the right answer.

Just by getting rid of that guy alone, two of their most threatening targets were basically giving up on the mission all on their own.

One got herself eliminated after sniffing out one of the assassins, and the other one was trying to get herself executed by acting like an idiot even though she wasn't one.

She'd decided on that move because she'd thought it was the correct answer, and it led her to reap even more rewards than she'd expected.

It was something so unexpected that it annoyed Charlotte in the end.

Reinhardt held more influence than she'd thought.

'Just what's so good about him?'

In any case, there was no reason to stop that girl from getting herself executed.

However, she just felt incredibly uncomfortable seeing her opponents not giving it their all.

Charlotte had already lost all interest in the group mission.

"Let's vote. I think it's pretty clear."

Charlotte suggested just executing her opponent, who so desperately wanted to die, with a smile on her face.

'I guess… He is worth liking.'

When she thought of Reinhardt, she didn't notice that her smile seemed a little different from usual.

* * *

When I heard her explanation as to how she was executed, I was shocked.

"Hey, dumbass, so you got suspected, started spouting nonsense, and then got executed? This idi—"

"Don't call me an idiot! A-and dumbass?! You're the dumbass! Hah… Hah! Hah!"

Harriet's face blanched and turned red, looking as if she wanted to deny reality. "Why should I listen to you calling me a dumbass after calling me an idiot?" was what she

seemed like she wanted to say.

“Isn’t this time more fitting than any other to call you ‘idiot’, though? You idiot.”

“Irrk! You! You really! No! Don’t call me an idiot! I’m not an idiot!”

Following my new approach of calling her dumbass, I made Harriet’s face red hot by using the classic “idiot”. She looked really pitiful.

But that girl got executed after mumbling some gibberish. I thought she was smart but was she actually unable to use her brain that well in practice? She seemed to be telling the truth, judging by how she looked.

She seemed to have gotten uselessly caught up in the culprits’ scheme

I hadn’t actually seen what had happened, so I couldn’t be too sure just by listening to her recounts.

Anyway, Harriet hadn’t been assassinated, but in the end, she had gotten eliminated on the following day.

And after some time, the next eliminated student arrived.

—It was Kono Lint.

In the original, Class A would nominate someone who might be Class B’s assassin, and Class B would nominate someone who could potentially be Class A’s assassin.

Of course, that wasn’t necessarily the case.

However, it was still a group mission in the end, so there was nothing good about reducing the number of people in one’s own class.

It felt like attacking one’s own class, after all.

However, in that day’s trial, two Class A students had been executed.

Four of Class A’s students had already been eliminated by day two.

“What’s your deal?”

Just as Harriet had been unfairly executed, it seemed like Kono Lint was in a similar situation.

“No! I was executed for nothing else but my ability! How does this make any sense?!”

He was about to cry out about how wronged he felt.

Kono Lint’s ability—Teleportation. Even if he had a bulletproof alibi, one couldn’t be all that sure what he did or didn’t do because of the variable called his supernatural power. Did they use that approach?

“…Right, you surely couldn’t say anything if they put you under suspicion like that.”

Kono Lint’s face turned pale at my words.

“No matter how much I can move my underwear together with me now… If I did that, I’d be declared completely crazy after this mission. Even if I were one of the assassins, do you really think I would use my ability?!”

Well…

If Kono Lint was one of the assassins and used his supernatural ability…

* * *

He would just randomly appear in one of his classmates’ private rooms wearing nothing but his underwear and then just disappear after declaring his assassination.

That was very… How should I say?

The perfect picture of a criminal.

Kono Lint seemed to feel really wronged, wondering how one could think that he would ever do something like that.

Yeah, he wouldn’t.

But what could I say? He had that kind of reputation. To be honest, it was somewhat bad.

—In a different sense from me, though.

He felt like shit.

“Actually, he had an alibi, but we were theorizing about how he would be able to assassinate someone if he were the assassin, and while we were talking about that…”

Harriet had been executed after spouting some gibberish.

Following that, they’d just assumed one of them was an assassin, one after the other, and theorized how they would be able to assassinate the others—that was the kind of discussion they had.

They just went through the students.

Then they got stuck on Kono Lint.

What if he was an assassin?

He could teleport into their rooms wearing just his underwear…

After imagining that picture in their heads, all of them unanimously decided to execute Kono Lint.

He might not have been the assassin, but if they were right, that would be incredibly terrifying.

The guy must have been really upset.

“It’s just not fair!”

“Yeah, well, what should I say? The ability to do it is as good as half the crime.”

Kono Lint left, looking for his private room after saying that he didn’t have enough energy to eat anything right then, as if he felt seriously dispirited that his ability itself had become subject to contempt.

Harriet looked around the mansion seeming as if she felt better, although she had also been executed quite unfairly.

"Wow, what's that? It's so well made."

Then, when she saw the snow human covered by an umbrella outside the window, her eyes widened.

After looking at it quite closely for some time, Harriet alternately looked between me and the snow human.

"That's you, right? Who made it?"

"..."

Ellen seemed a little reluctant to tell her, while Harriet looked a little uncomfortable, fiddling with her hair when she looked at her.

"Oh, us two, we made it... Yeah."

Harriet narrowed her brows and looked at me.

"I can't imagine you making a snowman... and something like that at that."

"I only rolled some snow for a bit, she was the one who made everything else."

"Oh, is that so...?"

Actually, I didn't really do much in the process of making that snowman. Harriet seemed unable to imagine me rolling up some snowballs with a straight face.

"I-I want to make a snowman as well."

What the hell kind of trend was that?

Harriet whined that she wanted to build a snowman in the evening as well.

* * *

She wanted to make a snowman, but she didn't want to do it alone, so I eventually entered the second round of snowman building; Ellen also joined in.

Harriet wasn't that dexterous with her hands...

However, she owned the cheat code called magic.

-Roll, roll, roll…

“One makes snow humans instead of snowmen, and the other makes snow giants instead of snowmen.”

Harriet’s snowball grew bigger and bigger, exceeding her own height, using telekinetic magic. The snowball grew so much that it was impossible to push it with one’s own strength, so she started using magic.

Even though the snowball had grown so large that it sometimes started to break apart, it always just rebuilt itself again.

Wizard.

I wanted to be a wizard as well!

“Hey, look at that! Have you ever seen a snowball that big before?”

“Is that so?"

Harriet, whose face had turned red, exclaimed. The cold didn’t seem to bother her. Just how great was that? Unlike Ellen, her expression clearly revealed whether she was happy or not.

She seemed happy, which put me in a good mood as well.

“Come on, push it. Hurry.”

Harriet grabbed my arm and dragged me along, asking me to push her giant snowball.

“Hup!”

It didn’t even budge.

I couldn’t roll that snowball consisting of compressed snow that exceeded Harriet’s and even my height.

“What? You can’t even push that much?”

Harriet covered her mouth as she snickered. No, was she trying to test me or something?

“Want me to show you?”

“Huh? Show me what?”

“Ah, just sit back and watch.”

That punk…

I didn’t want to use it just to roll some snowball.

Strengthening my muscles… to the max.

“Huup!”

I pushed the snowball with my arm, waist, and leg muscles tightening up.

-*Crunch!*

“…Huh?”

However, instead of rolling, the giant snowball began to collapse as my hands became stuck in it.

“Wh-what is…”

“Aaarg!”

-*Rumble!*

As the snowball collapsed, both Harriet and I were buried by the falling snow.

The two of us, who had been completely covered, found ourselves in a rather unusual situation.

“Hey! How hard did you push it for it to collapse?!”

However, Harriet seemed more upset about her snowball having been broken rather than our situation of being buried by said snowball.

“No, I didn’t know something like this would happen.”

“Whatever! Go away! I’ll just make one again!”

Harriet began to rebuild it again, huffing and wheezing as she tried to piece the snowball together again like putting together some puzzle pieces.

-Roll, roll, roll…

And Ellen was rolling a snowball that had already passed her own height with ease as if she was rolling a balloon.

No, Harriet actually needed to use magic to move it, but that girl was only using her physical strength to do it. And before I knew it, Harriet’s new snowball had grown even bigger than before after she rolled it around a bit.

No matter how strong she was, how was that possible?

No…

“Why the hell are you using Magic Body Strengthening to roll snowballs?”

Looking closely, I could see blue energy enveloping Ellen’s body. At my astonishment, Ellen looked at me with a sullen expression.

“If I don’t use it, I won’t be able to roll it.”

Magic was a noble discipline…

And there she was using that superhuman power to roll some snow.

That meant that she was already able to use Magic Body Strengthening at the level where she could use it for daily activities.

That was some unbelievable talent.

Anyway, Ellen seemed to have agreed to Harriet’s plan of creating a super-sized

snow giant after she had made a snow human.

* * *

To build the snowman, no, snow giant…

There were three steps in total:

First was Ellen's snowball, which was the biggest, next was the one Harriet made, which was second in size, and then there was the one I made using my supernatural ability that, while still really big, was the smallest of the three.

In order to maintain its balance, we did various things such as treating the base with magic, and like that, we managed to create a snow giant of about five meters.

Usually, one expressed the arms of a snowman with wooden sticks, which weren't enough on that scale, but we found some dead trees around and just slammed them into both sides of the snow giant.

"It turned into a snow monster, not just a snow giant."

It became a bizarre, twisted, two-armed snow monster. It wasn't cute at all, but it was kinda creepy.

"It's just a bit stylized."

"I don't think that's what you should call that."

"Anyways…!"

Harriet was smiling as if she was satisfied with the result. There were also some people watching from afar, seeming curious; they even brought some warm drinks for us, saying that we must've felt cold, so the three of us were just standing there, blankly admiring the completed snow giant.

The me who was made of snow by Ellen stood next to the snow giant.

"Why the hell did you make something like that?"

That wasn't training, nor was it magic research.

I couldn't believe we'd spent the whole day like that even though we were simply waiting for the group mission to end.

"It's fun, so isn't it fine?"

Harriet spoke with a bashful smile on her lips.

"Well, I guess so?"

Well, that was all the reason one would need, I guess.

"Actually, this was my first time making a snowman."

"…Really?"

Harriet's eyes twinkled at the sight of the huge snow giant, her face flushed red.

"While it does snow in the duchy, I'm not allowed to go outside because it isn't dignified. I also had no one to make one with."

Harriet was the young lady of a grand duchy, but in the end, she was like a princess of a country, so it seemed like that was the first time in her life that she'd done something like that.

"I'm glad I came to Temple."

Harriet smiled brightly, no shadow visible on her face, as she spoke happily.

She was cherished by her family, but in the end, her estate seemed more like a prison to Harriet.

Looking at Harriet as she expressed her true feelings without kicking up any fuss was somewhat painful.

CHAPTER 231

Nothing during the group mission went as planned.

I was knocked out during the first meeting, then Ellen dropped out voluntarily, and Harriet had gotten executed the next day.

And the most unexpected matter…

“Did you do this to confuse the others?”

On the second night, Charlotte assassinated herself.

“Well, that’s the excuse I gave to the teachers, but honestly, it just wasn’t fun anymore.”

Charlotte just threw the group mission.

No, but what about her grades in Temple?

* * *

While the nightly assassinations were underway, Ellen and I had dinner and then trained. Harriet watched us, saying that she was bored.

That was when I found Charlotte drinking some tea in the living room of the mansion.

In the original, it was Bertus who’d assassinated himself. However, since Charlotte was his assassin partner, not Dettomolian, it was she who assassinated herself.

—And her reason was that it just wasn’t fun.

Harriet found out from the teachers that Charlotte and Bertus were chosen to be the assassins, so she seemed unable to understand why Charlotte would be able to assassinate herself.

“No, but should you do something like that?”

She did say that her performance in Temple was important, although it shouldn’t have had a decisive impact on the Imperial Succession.

“It doesn’t really affect the overall result whether I win or lose, right?”

A mafia member would assassinate themselves to create confusion.

Charlotte and Bertus were the ones who led the mood of the meetings up until then, so the others would grow increasingly suspicious since they were working together.

However, if Charlotte were to be assassinated in that situation, it would become clear that she wasn’t an assassin, and there was also a possibility that Bertus could avoid their suspicions as well.

Even if she lost, she could still end up winning since the two of them were part of the same team.

So, she was saying that she ended up giving Bertus some serious trouble, huh?

She didn’t want to continue the group mission anymore because she’d lost interest, but she also found an opportunity to seriously mess with Bertus as well.

So Charlotte had simply given up.

Harriet seemed to be rather nervous, and Ellen looked a little glum.

Charlotte looked at them with a soft smile on her lips. She really did take a lot of care of her image.

That was the expression she would wear just before opening her eyes.

She uttered a suggestion in a soft voice.

“I heard they have a hot spring here, right? I want to take a bath with you.”

“Wh-what? With me?!”

“What?! Not with you!”

Seeing me startled by her absurd suggestion, Charlotte shouted, her face distorted.

* * *

Everyone agreed to Charlotte's suggestion because they wanted to wash up and take a rest anyway.

Reinhardt seemed to want to wash up in the indoor hot spring, while Charlotte, Harriet, and Ellen headed to the open-air bath.

"Urg. It's cold."

All of them dipped one foot into the hot spring with long towels wrapped around their bodies. Harriet seemed to find the open-air bath somewhat strange and trembled slightly, but her eyes looked bright when she entered the bath with her bare feet.

They all entered it with but a little distance between them.

"…"

"…"

"…"

Ellen didn't really think much about their situation, while Harriet looked to be somewhat restless, and Charlotte just observed the two of them.

All three of them were completely silent.

She always tried to win faced with any form of challenge, but Charlotte had given up of her own volition for the first time in her life.

She got annoyed and lost interest. If she gave up like that, then Bertus would have to clean up after her; that was also why she did it, to mess with him.

That was a lot more fun.

The two reasons why she had gotten so irritated and lost interest…

Charlotte was looking at both of them.

—Ellen Artorius.

She had concluded that she was the younger sister of the hero Ragan Artorius. She had already set an example by already placing her foot on the path to becoming a superhuman all on her own. Although, of course, Reinhardt followed right after her, the level of perfection was incomparable to Ellen's.

Harriet de Saint-Owan…

The young lady of the Saint-Owan Grand Duchy, a historical territory focused on magic. She was the greatest talent born to that great family. She was gifted with an unprecedented talent for all fields of magic. Her Talent was even called Magic, which required a huge amount of capital to grow. She would just continue to grow with the tremendous support her family provided her.

Without exaggeration, those two would become the continent's highest authorities in their respective fields in the future.

The apex of martial arts…

The apex of magic…

'But these two can't live without Reinhardt.''

It was quite funny.

Reinhardt's individual background was truly insignificant. However, in less than a year, Reinhardt had pulled those two talented individuals who could be called the future of the Empire to his side.

He probably hadn't intended to do that, but that was how it turned out anyway.

He just seemed to go through his life as he wished, but even though he acted like that, everything would turn out well.

Reinhardt…

It was no exaggeration to think that the future of the continent was in Reinhardt's

hands, was it?

Reinhardt claimed to be her friend, and Charlotte thought similarly.

He was indeed her friend.

However, she wasn't as hung up on him as those two were.

The feelings she felt towards him weren't enough for her to give up a group mission in the middle of it just because he wasn't there.

No.

In the end, she gave up on the mission because she lost all interest in it after Reinhardt's elimination, so it might be true to say that she dropped out because of him as well, right?

I…

What about me?

Am I not one of Reinhardt's people as well?

That's ridiculous.

It might be more appropriate to consider whether Reinhardt was one of her people or not. Their backgrounds couldn't even compare to each other.

However, in that sense, it was also unreasonable to see Harriet de Saint-Owan as one of Reinhardt's people. The young lady of the Saint-Owan Duchy and Reinhardt, who was part of a beggar organization, couldn't be compared with each other either.

—The same went for Ellen Artorius.

Although she may not have been aware of it, Ragan Artorius's status had already surpassed even the Emperor's among the Imperial Subjects. Those 'heroes' who survived after their service naturally would lose their reputation the longer they lived, but Ragan Artorius had traded his life for that incomparably great achievement

In the future, Ragan Artorius might even be mentioned in the same breath as the

gods, bordering on blasphemy.

Ellen, the younger sister of Ragan Artorius, could never be second to Harriet.

Both of them had much too strong of backgrounds to associate with the likes of Reinhardt.

But no matter how she looked at it, the two of them seemed to be Reinhardt's people. On the other hand, Reinhardt didn't look like he was their follower at all.

Charlotte was very intuitive about who she considered to be hers and who she didn't.

—Her followers should be people from whom she could profit.

There had to be something she wanted from them, and they also had to be able to provide those things.

Loyalty or the completion of a task, something like that.

Nor should they expect any reward for it, they had to blindly follow her.

As such, those two were absolutely Reinhardt's followers. Those girls would give Reinhardt whatever he wanted from them.

They also helped Reinhardt, not wanting anything in return.

However, the longer Charlotte continued that line of thought, her expression stiffened as if she'd lost confidence in her own stance.

* * *

Me too.

I'm the same.

If Reinhardt were in trouble, she would help him, and if he needed advice, she would always give him the best advice she could.

Whenever he needed help from the Imperial Family, she would make it happen…

And she wouldn't want to have anything in return from Reinhardt.

Their relationship that started through the letters persisted even without them. The only thing she wanted from him was gone, however, as that link had been broken to pieces, Charlotte and Reinhardt had decided to redefine themselves as friends.

Harriet de Saint-Owan and Ellen Artorius helped Reinhardt even when he didn't want them to,

—That was why they were Reinhardt's people.

She would also help him even if he didn't ask her to.

In the name of being his friend, she would go to great lengths to do things for Reinhardt and ask for nothing.

So, in the end, she was also one of Reinhardt's people—that was what Charlotte de Gardias suddenly realized.

Reinhardt wasn't one of her people…

She had become one of his people.

"Hah…"

Dumbfounded, Charlotte let out a quiet laugh as she bathed in the snowy open-air bath.

When she shook her head, she noticed that there was quite a lot of snow on it. She blankly watched the snowflakes melting down as they fell into the hot water.

She hadn't realized…

Only when she came to her senses did she feel how much of it had piled up.

* * *

One should desire to have what one wants.

At that moment, she felt strange being the one being possessed and not the one

possessing.

And maybe…

Those two didn't even realize that they were competitors.

Harriet, who seemed to look at her with uneasy eyes…

And Ellen, who was just dazedly enjoying the hot spring…



“Are the two of you close?”

“…Yes?”

“We’re close. Very.”

Ellen nodded and answered on Harriet’s behalf, who seemed slightly surprised. Her surprised expression turned into a blank one as if she was shocked by that innocent acknowledgment.

Charlotte knew that their relationship was akin to a sandcastle that could be destroyed with just a single word.

She felt that their relationship was a very deformed one, both of them pretending not to notice its impending destruction.

She could easily break it.

‘You like Reinhardt, don’t you?’

With just that one sentence, she could force them to admit that they knew each other's feelings and just pretended not to know, making both of them uncomfortable.

It would be ridiculous to still deny it in that situation.

It was unknown how their relationship would develop afterwards, but it was sure to be filled with sadness and ugliness.

However, Charlotte had no intention of throwing that stone into the calm lake.

‘Competitor, huh?'

She was an Imperial Princess.

No matter how much she recognized someone as a friend, nothing more than that was possible to develop. Of course, no one knew what might happen in the future. Charlotte also acknowledged the possibility.

However, not at that moment. Never.

However, that stone…

Just a slight graze would cause so much sadness and danger.

Didn't Harriet actually look like she was about to cry when Ellen admitted that they were close? Wasn't she sitting there pouring water all over her face for no reason, her expression showing guilt and frustration?

She seemed as if she was trying to wash her face, although there was nothing on it.

Was she trying to wash away the tears that seemed to pour out because of all the guilt she felt?

Both of them were precious to each other, but they were also rivals.

—So their relationship consisted of nothing but the guilt they felt towards each other.

What was the point of destroying a relationship that was bound to fall apart if left alone?

She had no reason for doing such a thing.

Charlotte had no intention to be the cause of their sadness. She knew how to drive a wedge between them and egg them on, but she didn't want to make them even sadder for no reason whatsoever.

It would only take one sentence to destroy them.

She couldn't think of a way to prevent it from happening.

There didn't seem to be any scenario in which both of them could be satisfied.

Charlotte could only think of negative outcomes but still didn't want to deliberately cause such unhappy endings.

To be frank, she didn't want either of them to be hurt.

After all, they were important people to Reinhardt.

But no matter how hard she thought about it, Charlotte simply couldn't come up with a solution.

* * *

The mission ended on the fourth day.

Bertus was executed.

It seemed like there was a limit to what he could do alone. It was like his head was about to explode as if he'd gotten hit on the back after Charlotte had carried out her self-assassination without discussing anything with him.

Rather than feeling a sense of crisis because Charlotte suddenly dropped out, it was like he almost had a mental breakdown because he was able to read Charlotte's true intentions.

As the assassin team, they won and lost together.

Even if one of them lost, they could still win.

On the other hand, they wouldn't be able to get a good overall grade for their class that time around.

So what Charlotte did was like saying, "Oh my, why don't you work hard on your own?" throwing everything onto him.

The explanation Charlotte gave the teachers was plausible enough, so she didn't get a failing grade.

After they had gone through two meetings already in which they completely dominated the flow of the discussion and the atmosphere, both Bertus and her had to have been under suspicion, so one might conclude that the two of them actually worked together.

If she were to be eliminated that time around, she could avoid all suspicion falling on her and perhaps Bertus, leading to great confusion.

Anyway, that was why she didn't fail and left Bertus to clean up the mess she'd left behind, which ended in him being executed.

The one who solved the mystery was—surprisingly—Ludwig.

He didn't investigate the crime scenes or find any conclusive evidence or anything like that.

He observed Bertus, who was already more than annoyed, as he used all of his energy to dominate the atmosphere of the meeting and just remarked something.

'Bertus, you talk a lot. I heard that the ones who talk a lot are actually the culprits.'

'…What?'

It was such a childish line of reasoning, no, it couldn't even be called a line of reasoning.

'N-no, wait a minute, Ludwig? What are you talking about? Later! I'll apologize later, so."

'Huh? No, if you put it like this…!'

'Let's just execute Bertus.'

'Ludwig. Calm down. You guys won't be able to get through this without me!'

Class A had lost a lot of students, so their situation was quite bad, meaning Class B was ahead in numbers.

So they just pressed for Bertus's execution.

That was how the mission ended.

Just where did my elaborately set-up mystery game go? It actually ended like a common game of mafia. It could even be called sloppy because they just randomly executed people.

As the mission was over, all the students, including those who were eliminated, were to gather in one place.

"Woow, I was actually right about Bertus. I just took a blind guess."

Ludwig, who had a knack for annoying people, laughed out loud.

Bertus's expression grew cold at that.

Ah. He opened his eyes again.

That look…

It wasn't directed at Ludwig.

—He was staring directly at Charlotte, who was smiling.

"Sister… Did you really have to make me clean up your shit? Couldn't you at least have told me before you decided to screw me over like that…?"

Bertus, who had completely taken off his mask, grabbed Charlotte's shoulders and fiercely stared at her.

"How could someone of the Imperial Family use such crass language? Do you have no dignity? You're not Reinhardt. It hurts! Could you let go of me?"

Charlotte smiled and intentionally bent over a little to make herself heavier. Those two only showed their bare faces when they were dealing with each other.

They knew that pretending to be on good terms with each other meant nothing, and everyone else saw those kinds of situations as a kind of daily routine.

No, but Charlotte…

Why did she have to say "You're not Reinhardt" in that situation?

"Wait, was Charlotte the other assassin?"

"Then why did you end up killed?"

Those who had just finished the mission and come to the mansion couldn't help but feel astonished because they could have never imagined that Charlotte was the other assassin.

"If they don't fail you, I'll seriously protest against the evaluation of this group

mission, got that?”

“Why? I had my own reasons for doing this, you know? If you start complaining, I will as well.”

"On what basis?!”

I think that was the first time I had ever seen Bertus that agitated. He looked like he really wanted to grind Charlotte to fine dust, and Charlotte just grinned as if telling him to try her.

Sometimes Bertus would land a hit on Charlotte, and something Charlotte would land one on Bertus.

However, because they weren’t able to cross a certain line, they felt both frustrated and about to explode on the inside.

It was Bertus’s loss.

CHAPTER 232

The group mission ended a day earlier than scheduled. Of course, they had also expected that kind of situation, but neither Mr. Mustang nor Mr. Epinhauser looked very happy

It might've been because the mission's progression was very sloppy.

Ellen had given up voluntarily.

Harriet, who was actually smart, was executed after spouting gibberish, and just when one thought the other students were properly trying to deal with the assassins' tricks, Charlotte had suddenly committed suicide, abandoning the mission, and in the end, Bertus, who was a step short of losing his mind, was a little bit too overburdened and was executed as a consequence of Ludwig's senseless reasoning at the meeting.

They looked as if they didn't really want to evaluate this mission at all.

But in the end, they had to.

They had to decide which of us was disappointing and who was a bit less disappointing.

"This group mission is Class B's victory."

The Class A guys were relatively more disappointing, and well, even though Class B's Ludwig just said stuff like, "You're talking a lot, so you must be the culprit!" he still ended up catching the assassin.

As a result, Class B won.

The group mission would be officially over once we returned to Temple on Sunday after resting Friday and Saturday in that mansion.

We could also return to Temple in advance, but I decided to stay there because Ellen asked me to.

-Wow, what's with that snowman?

-Why is it so big?

-There's something like a statue next to it.

Those that had just gotten there were all amazed by the snowmen that Ellen, Harriet, and I made—one for its sophistication and the other for its size.

All of them seemed to wonder who'd made them and were surprised to find out that we had made them.

Even though they were like that, they couldn't imagine me rolling snowballs like a child, so they started laughing.

"…What's with these bastards?"

No, why can't I make a snowman?!

I got pissed off for no reason.

* * *

The mansion was quite spacious, and each of the 22 students had a private room.

Anyway, although the results of the group mission were kind of disappointing, the evaluation had ended. It was Class B's victory. Of course, Bertus and Charlotte, who were nominated as assassins, also received individual scores.

Unsurprisingly, the only ones who performed well in the face of those pathetic results was the assassin team.

They'd played the most important role during the meetings in placing suspicion from themselves onto others.

So, in the end, Bertus and Charlotte scored pretty well.

Of course, I failed without being able to do anything, but I didn't really care all that

much about it.

There were some among the students who wanted to enter the mansion quickly because they heard that it had a hot spring, and some just wanted to play around, making snowmen for example, perhaps because we had made some.

What was that sudden rise in the popularity of making snowmen?

Friday morning…

“The mission was over before we could even do anything”

Everyone nodded at Liana’s words. The mission, which was filled with tension originally, ended in a completely anticlimactic manner.

After having some breakfast, I, as well as the four A-class girls, sat together and drank some tea.

“By the way, why does it snow so much even though it’s not winter yet?”

Liana trembled. Perhaps she hated the cold.

“Perhaps because this place is in the far north.”

Harriet explained that it would be winter almost year-round in that place because it was located at the northernmost edge of the continent.

“But the hot spring was nice. My body got all warmed up.”

It seemed like Liana had thoroughly enjoyed the hot spring.

"I usually only visit tropical resorts in the winter, but bathing in these kinds of hot springs in this cold place isn’t too bad either.”

It seemed like Liana’s vacationing style would change slightly after we returned from that mission

Come to think of it… it was purely Liana’s suggestion to visit the Edina Islands during

our summer vacation.

Oh…

Then…

Would she rent out a hot spring resort and invite us to go play there during our winter vacation?

Of course, I couldn't be sure about that yet.

"Now that I talked about it, I just have to take another bath there."

Liana wanted to go into the hot spring once more just as she was thinking about it.

She seemed to have really liked it.

Unlike Liana, the others didn't seem to have the same thoughts. It looked like they'd woken up early that morning and had already used it.

"Should we take a walk?"

As if she suddenly remembered something, Ellen suggested such.

A walk…

Well, there was nothing else we could do.

* * *

It was only Harriet, Ellen, and I who decided to take a walk. Adelia was hesitant about accepting the invitation and eventually decided to not go.

-*Poff! Pooff!*

-H-hey! Throw gently!

-Just dodge better, Delphine!

-You bastard!

The Class B guys were throwing snowballs at each other, suddenly having decided to have a snowball fight while making a snowman.

Making snowmen and having snowball fights… They played around like little kids.

—But so did I.

Near the mansion was a forest. White steam was rising from the open-air bath.

We walked through said forest. It was slightly hard to see because of the falling snow, but in the distance, we could faintly see the silhouette of the ancient castle Epiax between the trees.

“Doesn’t it actually seem kind of creepy?"

Looking at the castle, Harriet slightly trembled, perhaps due to the cold or because it creeped her out that much. It certainly had a spooky atmosphere about it.

“True.”

I’d set it up as an eerie place, but because it had become reality, the atmosphere surrounding it made people feel uncomfortable just by looking at that gloomy and creepy old castle.

There seemed to be icicles hanging from every wall, there were copious amounts of snow on the roof, and its overall color was a blackish gray.

It felt even more intimidating because it wasn’t just some old castle but a well-built one.

However, Ellen just tilted her head as if she had different thoughts.

“That castle… What’s it for?"

Ellen seemed curious about that part.

Being creepy aside, it had to have a use.

"It doesn’t look like anyone is actually living there."

“…Come to think of it, you’re right."

* * *

Harriet also tilted her head when she realized that.

Of course, because it wasn’t a survival mission, they served us meals, but the ones who provided the food were staff members that were temporarily dispatched to that place because of the mission.

There was no Lord of Epiax or anyone who lived in the castle.

—It was only used for short periods of time as a mission area.

And I had no idea what else it was used for either.

I’d just thought that it would be nice to have the characters play mafia in an ancient castle. I didn’t really think about its history or why it was abandoned.

"Where is this place to begin with?”

Yet another question.

We had simply arrived there through a warp gate. We only vaguely knew where we were, but not specifically.

Harriet pondered over Ellen’s question with her brows furrowed.

“Seeing that it’s snowing so much at this time… I think we are at the extreme northern frontier of the Empire or something like that. Considering that there are hot springs in this place, that would mean a lot of geothermal heat… But I don’t exactly know where the hot spring actually formed…”

It wasn’t Harriet’s field of expertise, so it seemed like she couldn’t pinpoint our location either.

“Why are you thinking about this so hard? We can just ask the teachers.”

We didn’t actually have to find out the answer on our own—all we had to do was go and ask the teachers where we were and what the ancient castle Epiax was for.

Harriet pouted her lips as if she had gotten annoyed by my words.

“Tch, not a shred of romance in you.”

“What romance?"

“I don’t know, you idiot!”

As if ready to leave, Harriet turned to the mansion, saying, “Let’s go ask the teachers.”

What the? She gets angry at the strangest times.

* * *

Mr. Epinhauser easily answered us.

“We are located in the northern polar zone. It doesn’t fall under any jurisdiction. Well, if one went a certain distance south from this place, one would find Glamos. It’s a small country located in the region.”

A small country named Glamos located in the northernmost part of the continent… We were even further north. Looking at the map Mr. Epinhauser spread out, we really were at the northernmost edge of the continent.

“If you go even further north from here… You will reach B-8’s place of origin. Of course, it isn’t that close to our current location.”

Dettomolian was part of a tribal society based in the northern snowfields of the continent. He was someone who’d grown up in a place that couldn’t even be called a country. It sure was amazing that he somehow heard about Temple while living in such a place.

In any case, that meant that most of the northernmost regions were no different from uninhabited land, and the same rang true for that place.

That was the answer to our first question.

“What about the castle?"

Harriet asked about the ancient castle Epiax, which she was obviously curious about.

What about the castle? While it wasn't enormously huge, it wasn't small either.

So she seemed to think it had to have had some unusual use before.

"I don't know."

However, the answer we received from Mr. Epinhauser was enough to shock the three of us.

He didn't know…

We could have never imagined that he would answer like that, so all three of us were really confused.

"No, then… did you just decide to hold a group mission in a place whose use is completely unknown?"

"We are sure that it isn't a dangerous place. And this wasn't my decision, it was Temple's. I don't have the authority to decide the location or content of the missions."

That teacher openly told his students that he didn't really have much to say about it.

He was so direct that we didn't know what to say.

"It's a strange place. The climate around these parts isn't suitable for people to live in. However, someone built such a large castle in this environment, and there are no records whatsoever of who lived in it before. The castle's name is also just the name of the person who discovered it, but no one actually knows its original name."

The ancient castle Epiax…

It was a stranger place than I initially thought.

It had been set as a mission area because of its spooky atmosphere, but it turned out that it actually was quite an eerie place.

It was clear that there were no safety problems, and I had set up the place to be spooky for the mission, but it was really unclear why or by whom that castle had been built.

Was that how it felt to have gone into a haunted house without even knowing?

I was getting goosebumps.

However, Harriet's eyes were sparkling.

"Th-then can I go back there? It's safe, after all."

"Hmm, I don't mind. Why?"

What?

But I don't want to go in there again!

Why was she doing that?

"Just because… I'm curious. Maybe we can find out what the castle is really for, right?"

"Hmmm… Then we already investigated the castle, so you won't be able to find out anything more. Fine, you still have plenty of free time, so you can spend it however you want."

Mr. Epinhauser seemed to think that it was up to us how we wanted to spend our free time.

"However, even if there are no other dangers to be found in the castle, keep in mind that we are currently located in a northern region. While the cold won't pose any danger to you, as you can use magic, you shouldn't stay out too long."

"Yes!"

Harriet alternately looked at Ellen and me, her eyes twinkling.

Her expression showed that something like an adventurous spirit had awoken in her.

I quickly figured out why.

She hadn't been able to go to the Darklands with us…

So she really wanted to do something like that with us.

I really didn't want to go back to that eerie place, but I simply couldn't make those words leave my mouth because I understood too well why she acted the way she did.

[Event Quest - The Ancient Castle Epiax]

[Description : Reveal the secret of the ancient castle Epiax]

[Reward : 500 Achievement points]

And then, out of nowhere, I received even more motivation.

Were they telling me to do something else since I'd wonderfully failed the group mission?

There was nothing I could do about it.

"Hm, then again…"

However, Mr. Epinhauser seemed to have thought it over again. As expected, did he judge that what we were about to do was too dangerous?

"No, it'll be fine. Let's go."

Why was he so anxious?!

CHAPTER 233

The mission was over, so we shouldn't have had anything to do with Epiax anymore, but I still ended up returning to the ancient castle for different interest-oriented reasons.

I found out that I would be given achievement points…

I wondered if the three of us could even figure out something that even Temple couldn't figure out.

At first, I thought I might invite the other kids who were interested in coming with us, but it occurred to me that Harriet might not like it, so it was just the three of us who set out for the ancient castle.

Ellen, Harriet, and me, the three of us, tracked through the snowy forest.

We wouldn't face any danger. They had originally been able to set that mysterious place up as a venue for group missions due to how safe it was, after all.

Harriet's tension was rising, perhaps because she was excited to uncover the secrets surrounding that unknown, suspicious, ancient castle, or it might have been because she enjoyed going on an adventure with us.

"Ah…"

Of course, that excitement sharply dropped as soon as we arrived.

-Whoooosh…

The gloomy silhouette of the ancient castle of Epiax revealed itself once again in the snow.

I had originally been wary of the place because it was a mission venue, but then I learned that the castle was actually built in an unexplored and uninhabited area.

It couldn't be helped that we felt a bit of anxiety when we arrived.

There wouldn't be any ghosts, but it still felt like something would definitely pop out.

Of course, Ellen, our ever-so-reliable bastion of calm, was just blankly looking at the eerie castle.

"I-I'm going to use these."

Harriet took something out of her pocket, perhaps because she felt the tension in the air.

—They were the earrings with tranquility magic cast on them.

…She seemed to always carry them with her. Anyway, I had given them to her to use in exactly that sort of situation.

Harriet put them on and took a few deep breaths.

"…It's still scary."

Of course, they didn't change Harriet's personality to the point that it felt like the complete opposite.

"But… I can tell now that I look at it…"

Harriet, who had regained some of her composure with the assistance of the magic artifact, nodded slowly. Was she saying that she could do it if she had to?

"This isn't a castle…"

Harriet was referring to Epiax.

"It's a palace."

It was a palace, not a castle.

When I thought about it, I realized she was right.

There was no defensive moat, no castle tower with cannons, nor a drawbridge.

It wasn't a fortress or a castle built for the sake of defense…

It was a space created to be lived in and to hold ceremonies—a palace.

* * *

I didn't go there with any expectations of discovering anything, but there were a few things that I noticed when I looked at ancient castle Epiax itself. It wasn't a defensive fortress, but a palace built for the sake of being lived in.

Harriet couldn't help but notice those things to begin with because she actually lived in such a place.

She was a thoroughly wealthy young lady, after all.

Although there were no walls surrounding it and all the buildings seemed to be connected with each other, the main area, which was the central building, was arranged in a square shape with a clearing in the middle.

I didn't know if it had a garden or something similar, but it was a very spacious area.

The more I looked at it, the stranger Epiax actually seemed.

All of the staff members who had been temporarily staying there had also left, so that spacious palace called Epiax was completely empty.

They hadn't even locked it up or anything.

As such, we simply walked into the dreary old castle.

Even if someone tried to occupy it without permission, nobody would know.

However, if anyone actually tried to occupy it, even without permission, rather than be punished, they would probably deserve a reward. There were no signs of life anywhere around there.

"If it's a palace of this size, its owner had to have been someone that was the equivalent of a king…"

Ellen and I couldn't help but agree with Harriet's words. However, according to Mr. Epinhauser, it was an uninhabited area, and it took a long time to even reach the small southern country of Glamos.

"I don’t really know much about Glamos, but would their royal palace even be of such a scale?”

Harriet shook her head at my question.

"No, I don’t think so. I also don’t know much about Glamos, but judging by the fact that I didn’t know it existed, it doesn’t seem to be a big country.”

Wow.

Look at her looking down on a country.

The citizens of Glamos would most certainly feel hurt if they heard her words because she didn’t even mean it in a mocking way.

“If it’s of this scale, I think it was used by a nation with considerable financial power, although not on the level of our duchy. The location is quite the problem though.”

If one took the entirety of Epiax and just gave it to some decently-sized country to use as a palace, there would be many countries who would be grateful for it.

-Clack, clack.

It was so quiet that the sound of our steps echoed through the hall.

Ellen didn’t really look scared, and Harriet could tolerate it thanks to the tranquility earrings.

I…

I really wanted to go back, achievement points or not.

That place was scary, you know?

Of course, I couldn’t say those things out loud.

"I don’t know much about architecture, but this palace is really well made.

"That’s true.”

So, unlike me, who was somewhat scared, Harriet confidently walked down the hallway while talking. The ceiling, windows, and columns weren't built roughly but were actually quite aesthetically pleasing.

There were also some sculptures placed along the walls.

"What are these pieces? They don't look like the gods."

Although there were a lot of statues, it didn't seem easy to infer from their characteristics what kinds of people lived there.

"When was this all made, who lived here, and where did they all go…?"

We weren't there for a mission but to investigate that castle itself. There were various rooms within. Harriet was leading the way because she was the only one who knew the structure of those kinds of palaces due to her background.

"Hmmm, going by the structure, this seems to be the audience room."

I didn't know by what criteria Harriet based that on, but it seemed that the characteristics of palaces were rather similar.

So, structurally, we should have been in an audience room.

It was a wide-open space with extremely high ceilings.

"Isn't this where we held the meetings?"

"Yes."

There was the round table.

The place where I had been executed on the first day… It should have been the audience room, however, that place was actually used as a gathering place to determine the identity of the assassins during the game of mafia.

"Looking at the room, it doesn't seem like there was a throne in here originally."

It looked like Harriet had deduced that the space was originally like that. It wasn't like there had originally been a throne there that Temple had removed or something.

“That would mean that the people who resided in here weren’t royalty or anything like that.”

“Perhaps…”

A round table was placed in what was supposed to be an audience room occupied by royalty.

While it was a palace, it could be presumed that it wasn’t a royal palace.

Of course, as the castle seemed to have a long history, all objects other than the sculptures and structures attached to the castle that could be broken or destroyed had been removed.

"I think they brought all the beds and utensils from Temple. They weren’t here originally.”

The rooms had already been emptied out by the time the students had left. There were no other specific pieces of furniture left inside the castle.

“While it wasn’t built by a nation, it was built by a group that could build structures on par with the royal castles of other countries in a polar region like this…”

* * *

Harriet continued to nod her head as she walked, thinking that the entire thing was ridiculous, to say the least.

“But why did they build it here?”

Ellen seemed to have different questions.

“Right.”

“The conditions here are pretty bad."

It snowed all year round, so it was difficult to get any supplies there, and the living conditions were also rather harsh.

“If they used people to build a palace of such a size, the builders would take a really

long time to finish up the work in this extremely cold environment. Even in a normal environment, it would have taken a very long time, but it should have taken a lot more time and money to build a building of this size here."

Although there wouldn't be any problem with space, since the palace was uninhabited, building something of such a scale in that frigid area would have cost an astronomical amount of money compared to building a palace in normal places.

Harriet nodded at Ellen's words.

"That's right. It would have cost a lot more money and time to build a building like this in a place like this. However, the fact that a palace of such a size is located here—
"

"Would lead to two assumptions."

I also had come to my own conclusions

"Either it had to be built here specifically…"

"Or the environmental conditions didn't bother them."

A gigantic palace built in no man's land…

We didn't find any definite clues, but the more I got to know how strange that place actually was, the closer I arrived to the truth.

Ellen slowly nodded at my words.

"Or it could be both."

"Both?"

"It had to be in this location, however, the location might not have affected the ones building it."

Ellen seemed to have figured it out already.

“It might not have been humans who lived here.”

Harriet and I both seemed shocked, the color leaving our faces.

No.

Why did I get scared?

I wasn’t human either!

Anyway, it might not have been humans who lived in that palace, so it might not have been humans who built it either.

Ellen’s assumption was quite plausible.

“Then… does that mean demons or something? Was this place inhabited by different… beings?”

“I don’t know. There might be races that can live anywhere regardless of the temperature.”

I had learned a bit about the ecology of demons, but I still didn’t know everything about every race.

“This isn’t the Darklands.”

Harriet seemed to have some doubts. While we were in the northernmost area of the Empire, the place wasn’t part of the Darklands.

“It’s possible that demons don’t only live in the Darklands.”

“That’s true…”

Demons didn’t necessarily have to live in the Darklands. In fact, demonic beasts and monsters occasionally appeared in areas inhabited by humans as well and needed to be subdued.

Of course, we couldn’t tell for sure that it was demons who’d built that place yet.

“It might also have been the headquarters of something like a secret magic society. Buildings like this could have also been made through magic. High-ranking wizards should be able to procure as many materials as they want.”

Harriet was a wizard herself, so her thoughts seemed to lean toward magic as well.

If it was the doing of some secret magic association, there was a possibility that they might have wanted to build their headquarters in an uninhabited area where no one would come by. The issue of material procurement would have been solved with magic, and construction would have been more than possible if there were enough wizards around.

Ellen nodded her head, apparently thinking that it was a plausible explanation as well.

"Then that would explain why there's a round table in this place that should be an audience room rather than a throne.”

“Right.”

The leader of a magic society wasn’t something like a king, so it was more than plausible that they would have a conference room in that place that should be an audience room.

Non-human entities or magic societies…

It was clear that the original owners of Epiax wouldn't have been ordinary people.

* * *

It was unclear who had originally lived in Epiax. However, even though it was still daytime, it felt really creepy walking around that dark, old castle.

-Wooooooh…

Maybe it was because of a draft, but we could hear the sounds of wind here and there.

It seemed to be howling, or that was what it felt like at least.

“Oh, this sounds so weird.”

“It’s just the sound of the wind, you idiot.”

After walking around for a while, Harriet turned around, not seeming to be scared, perhaps because her curiosity outweighed her fear, or maybe because of the tranquility earrings.

Shouldn’t she be all scared and clingy in situations like this?

Were the earrings I gave her too much of a cheat item?

"Are you really scared of things like that?”

“It’s weird not to be scared of these things, you know?”

Fear is felt by anyone regardless of age! I was especially weak to those kinds of things! One managed to hold on by using some items, and the other one seemed to have the attitude that even if a ghost popped up, it would just be a ghost.

Harriet was happily watching me, as she had never seen me that cowardly before. I seriously didn’t know what would happen.

“Yeah, I sure hope a ghost or something pops out.”

“What bullshit are you saying?”

Rather than being scared of ghosts, it seemed like she wanted to see me get shocked by one. What the hell was wrong with her head?

-Uooooooogh… Huuhuuhuuhuu…

“Oh, the wind really does sound like someone crying, huh?”

The sound of the wind sounded like sobbing. However, that wasn’t the thing I seemed confused about.

“What crying? It’s just the wind…”

-Huuhuuuhuu… Boohoohooouk…

Seriously, that was just straight-up crying!

“U-urg! What the hell?!”

“O-oh gosh!”

-Hug!

Both me and Harriet reflexively hugged Ellen, who was walking between us.

“?”

She looked rather puzzled when the two of us suddenly clung to her.

It seemed like she reflexively hugged Harriet and me as if trying to protect us.

Harriet’s and my eyes met as we hugged Ellen from both sides.

Both her and me…

We instinctively knew that it would be best to run to Ellen when things got dangerous.

CHAPTER 234

Something crying…

I could hear something sobbing and crying mixed with the sounds of the wind.

“Wh-what? What is… What is this? Just what the hell?”

"M-me, too. I don’t know! How should I know?!”

In extreme situations that even rendered tranquility magic useless, Harriet and I could only think of clinging to Ellen.

‘No, we were told this is a safe place, a safe place! They said that there wouldn’t be any safety problems here!’

Then what was that thing sobbing behind the walls?!

“It shouldn’t be anything serious.”

Ellen wrapped her arms around the shoulders of Harriet and me, who were clinging to her. It was comforting that Ellen was so calm.

Ellen would take care of it.

—No matter what happened. Ah, there was also her sword.

I also had one… Huh…

Anyway, I’d just trust her!

I hugged Ellen even tighter, and so did Harriet.

“The teacher said it was safe.”

However, it was kind of hard to believe that nothing would happen no matter how much Mr. Epinhauser said that it was safe.

Temple wasn't all that perfect, okay?

I made it like that, so I know!

Temple was unexpectedly sloppy!

It would have been hard for certain incidents to happen if it was too perfect, so it was kind of a mess in certain parts!

She heard crying from an unidentified source while walking through that eerie place, but she still didn't think it was dangerous? What kind of nerves of steel did she have?

Something seemed to be about to pop out, so we stopped while still stuck to Ellen.

-Scrap

"U-uwaaaak!"

And something really appeared from behind the wall, which led Harriet to scream, and me to hold onto Ellen even more with my eyes wide open.

I had grown tired of screaming.

I felt like I was about to faint with my eyes open.

I hate this.

I don't like this at all!

-Bohohok… Huk…

A whitish figure was wandering along the corridor, crying. Even though we had screamed so loudly, it didn't even look at us.

Ellen wasn't the least bit surprised when she saw it.

"I think that's a ghost… the lowest-ranking kind."

"Gh-ghost…?"

Was she talking about ghosts?!

Why were ghosts there?

Why did they say it wasn't dangerous when there were ghosts there?!

"Perhaps this place emits a huge amount of spiritual energy, and that's why we can see ghosts that are usually not visible to the eye. It probably won't harm us. It won't even notice us."

-Buhuhuk… Huhuk…

"So, that being said, it isn't a monster or a demon. It's just a natural phenomenon. You don't have to be afraid."

It seemed that the ghost could neither perceive nor touch us.

Ellen seemed to know a lot about them. I didn't know whether she learned that from our Demon Ecology class or from somewhere else, though.

A low-level ghost…

They weren't dangerous, just harmless natural phenomena.

It was probably not a demon, then.

I wasn't even sure when something could be called a demon.

Ellen told us not to be afraid, but I actually felt rather scared of Ellen, who was perfectly calm in that situation.

Come to think of it, there was something Dettomolian had said to me.

Ghosts are everywhere around us, and we just don't perceive them.

The spiritual energy in the ancient castle Epiax was just so strong that the ghosts around us became visible.

In other words, ghosts themselves weren't particularly dangerous; they were just something you weren't usually able to see.

“Wh-why didn’t they appear during the mission…?"

Harriet opened her mouth, her expression rather faint. The sobbing ghost passed through a wall and disappeared somewhere.

“If we saw them during the mission, we would have probably been too distracted by them, so they somehow managed to keep them away.”

Since the mission was over, the Temple personnel had returned, so the ghosts who were banished from the palace might have simply returned.

“Ah, so…”

I remembered that Mr. Epinhauser had tried to hold us back for a moment when we were about to go as if he had just remembered something.

However, after he thought about it some more, he’d told us to just go.

No, but no matter how harmless they were, shouldn’t he have at least mentioned something about ghosts possibly appearing there? Huh?!

Was it that much of a hassle?

No matter how I looked at it, it had to be that, right?

Harriet’s and my eyes met.

While I wasn’t sure what she was thinking, we both seemed to want to leave the place immediately.

“Amazing, I’ve never seen a ghost before."

Ellen, on the other hand, seemed to be rather interested in everything. When ordinary people saw ghosts in a place like that, they would usually just book it, but why did she seem to find it interesting all of a sudden?

And wasn’t it normal for people to never want to see a ghost their whole life?

“Why are you afraid of something that can’t harm us or even see us?”

It seemed like Ellen was unable to understand why Harriet and I were afraid of that harmless natural phenomenon.

“I don’t really know how to describe it, but you’re right, which makes me feel pretty miserable… Yeah.”

“S-same for me…”

Both Harriet and I felt a strange sense of defeat toward Ellen.

“Let’s go over there.”

At first, Harriet had been talking loudly, darting from place to place, but after that ghost appeared, it was Ellen who took the lead.

From my point of view, both of them seemed crazy.

However, Ellen was definitely crazier than Harriet.

* * *

The place wasn’t infested with ghosts, but they were there.

It was obvious that the staff dispatched from Temple somehow expelled the ghosts. Was that an actual haunted spot?

If the other students had found out, they would have definitely turned pale.

It seemed like Ellen was accumulating knowledge in that field in her own time as well, not only on demons but also on other entities. As soon as she saw that ghost, she knew it was completely harmless.

“You can’t really figure anything out from a ghost, right?” Harriet asked, still sticking close to Ellen.

“I guess.”

Temple should have known that it was a haunted spot, and they most definitely would have tried to uncover the ancient castle Epiax’s secrets themselves as well. That meant that we couldn’t figure anything out from those ghosts.

Ghosts didn't have a proper shape and only cried or wandered around while muttering incomprehensible words.

They might've been ghosts bound to the place, or they might not have been. After I realized that they were harmless, I wasn't as freaked out as I was before.

Of course, that didn't mean I wasn't scared anymore.

"…Can't we look into them more with something like Necromancy?"

Harriet looked at me with a slight pout after listening to my question.

"Although Temple is somewhat tolerant toward black magic, Necromancy is forbidden art. No one should ever use it."

A forbidden art, meaning a forbidden form of magic.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

Although Temple had a black magic curriculum, it didn't deal with evil magic corresponding to forbidden arts, which was why they didn't use necromancy when they were investigating that place.

That said, while necromancy, which belonged to black magic, couldn't be used, we could use Dettomolian's magic to investigate.

Temple had no idea what kind of magic it actually was, so they didn't ban it.

Of course, they might think about it later.

We wandered around that castle haunted by ghosts some more. It was unclear whether most of the furniture was originally missing or if it had all been removed or recovered when that place was discovered.

As such, we had to guess what uses most of the rooms might have served. We were already aware of a place that looked like a banquet hall, places that looked like storage rooms, and places that looked like bedrooms.

Epiax was so spacious that I didn't think we would be able to make a whole round trip of it in a single day.

We entered a huge building that was quite far from the central building. It was located so far away from everything that no one would have thought to go there during the mission.

They had apparently preserved the place closest to how it was originally.

"I think this is supposed to be a chapel."

A chapel…

"But it still seems a little different. In the grand chapel in our palace, we arranged the five great gods' stone statues in the back, and in front of them is a pulpit… But this is—"

"It's built in the form of a dome."

Ellen finished Harriet's words.

Its structure wasn't typical of a normal church or temple.

The place was built in the shape of a dome, and there were sculptures erected in every direction in a circular form. Unlike the other statues we'd seen in the hallway, they were extremely large in size.

However, Harriet didn't refer to that place as a chapel for no reason.

"It's a Pantheon."

The sculptures placed against the wall of the circular room should've represented the image of one of the gods. However, we could all see that it wasn't a pantheon that housed the great gods.

Ellen opened her mouth.

"There are more. They also look different."

"You're right."

A place that was slightly different from a chapel—a Pantheon.

However, if this was supposed to be a pantheon of the known gods, then there should have only been five statues.

However, there were seven of them there.

Harriet nodded silently.

"Just what on earth are these figures?"

“I’m not sure about the other statues in the hallway, but these seem to have some meaning behind them,” Ellen said.

The sculptures there should have been important to the people who originally resided there.

They weren’t the great gods or the demonic gods—there would have been five statues if it was a depiction of them.

“Since they all look human, then that would mean that the people who lived here should have been human as well, right?”

Harriet’s opinion was valid.

She had deduced that the place might have been the headquarters of some sort of magic society.

* * *

So those seven sculptures could’ve been of people who’d played an important role in said association or were respected wizards of the past.

The faces of those seven figures were carved in great detail. Although they had become weathered with the passage of time, we could still see that they were made quite skillfully and carefully.

They weren’t wearing robes, so we couldn’t be sure that they were sculptures of wizards.

Of course, one didn't have to wear a robe to be a wizard.

"Hmm, I don't think we can find anything more by looking at the statues' faces. We can just see that they were crafted in great detail."

Harriet sighed, thinking that it was completely meaningless to continue to ponder about what those statues might be.

I also looked at each of the statues' faces and couldn't help but stiffen.

"What's the matter?"

When Harriet asked me what had happened, I quickly loosened my hardened expression and raised my head.

"Ah no. It's nothing."

However, my heart was beating like crazy.

One of the statues…

Its face looked incredibly similar to Eleris's.

I didn't want to think like that, but…

This is Eleris, right?

Why the hell is a statue of Eleris placed in this ancient castle located in the northern region of the Empire?

All of my doubts were quickly resolved.

'Yes, I'm Eleris of Tuesday from the Seven Nights.'

One of the vampire lords. The head of the House of Tuesday, Eleris.

Seven stone statues…

Seven Houses…

The ancient castle, Epiax…

That place was definitely related to the seven vampire lords and their Houses.

[Quest completed]

[Received 500 Achievement Points.]

My guess was right.

* * *

I didn't know whether all seven vampire lords had resided in that ancient castle now called Epiax.

However, it was obvious that the history of the castle reached far back.

Eleris had clearly said that she didn't know what the Monday and Sunday clans were like.

However, there were seven statues there.

I couldn't help but notice which of them were supposed to represent the vampire lords of Sunday and Monday.

There were just two statues that seemed a lot more weathered than the others.

The two oldest sculptures… they were the ones that seemed to represent the vampires of Sunday and Monday. There was even a statue of Eleris.

It became more than clear that Eleris was the head of the House of Tuesday.

Ellen and Harriet couldn't glean anything from them, but I managed to figure everything out myself.

Since when did this castle exist?

Why did this castle stop being used?

What happened to the other five Vampire Lord's houses except for Monday and Sunday?

While Harriet spun the wheels inside her head as she looked around the Pantheon, I was organizing my thoughts.

That was when Ellen suddenly grabbed my sleeve.

"Uhm…"

"Ah, yeah? Did you find something?"

Ellen pointed to the statue I was standing in front of.

"Hey, are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

What? What is she talking about?

Ellen whispered into my ear, low enough that Harriet couldn't hear what she was saying.

"Doesn't it look like Ms. Relya?"

"?!"

No…

Right!

She didn't know Eleris, but she had seen Eleris under her Relya disguise. Eleris had only made a few modifications to her face, so she'd still seemed like herself overall.

So in the end, that statue of Eleris, which had slightly deteriorated, also strangely

matched Relya's appearance.

And what was it that Eleris had told Ellen again?

"Ms. Relya, the one who said she was a dragon."

"A-ah… Y-you're right."

When she was asked why she'd pretended to be a weak, low-ranking wizard, Eleris had given the bizarre excuse that she was actually a dragon who came out to play.

And then, among the seven statues located in a Pantheon of some unidentified castle, stood one that resembled Relya, who'd claimed to be a dragon.

An ancient but definitely sophisticated palace…

Of course, Ellen hadn't fully believed Eleris's lies. She just thought that she was a very powerful magician and had her own circumstances.

However, Ellen's last doubts were completely shattered by that stone statue resembling Eleris in that completely unknown place.

A weird wizard who claimed to be a dragon…

We encountered a stone sculpture that resembled her in an extremely old castle that definitely hid some unusual secrets.

When those two pieces of evidence finally aligned with each other, Ellen simply nodded slowly as if she no longer held any doubts about her words.

"This… was where dragons had lived."

Ellen already seemed completely convinced of the existence of those mythical dragons.

Eleris…

Your little lie ruined Ellen…

She was going to live her life believing that she had found a place dragons once resided in!

If anyone told her that there were no such beings as dragons or something, she would answer that they were wrong because she'd seen one herself.

That was how things would turn out!

CHAPTER 235

I knew the truth, but I couldn't tell Ellen, as such, she came to believe that it was where dragons once lived.

If that wasn't what one would call a butterfly effect, then I don't know what it could be called. The problem in the matter, however, was that the butterfly effect was caused by Eleris that time, not me.

Anyway…

As Temple had declared, the ancient castle Epiax was a safe place, even though ghosts tended to appear in it. Of course, if they were to find out who the original owners of Epiax were, they wouldn't use it as a group mission venue anymore.

Harriet couldn't figure anything out, and Ellen was convinced that it was the home of dragons.

Of course, Ellen didn't tell Harriet about that because our association with Relya was a secret.

I was the only one who uncovered the real truth.

One clearly wouldn't be able to figure it out if one didn't know the seven vampire lord houses and Eleris.

"Nothing happened in the end."

"…Did you want something dangerous to happen?"

"No! That's not what I mean!"

On our way back, Harriet spoke as if she was disappointed that nothing really happened.

To be precise, it was more like she was frustrated because she couldn't figure anything out rather than finding it a shame that nothing happened.

Of course, I had found out something, but I just couldn't share it with them.

Nothing much happened afterwards. We just took a bath in the hot spring and had a snowball fight.

The snowballs that Ellen threw were seriously dangerous.

I really got bruises from them.

Harriet used telekinetic magic to throw hers, but they were by far not as painful, however I avoided them with all my might because I felt like I would lose if I got hit by them.

* * *

Nighttime at the hot spring.

"Urg. This sure hurts a lot."

Not only did I get pelted by her snowballs, but I also trained with Ellen until late.

My body became such a mess that I wondered if I had broken something.

I washed up in the hot spring at midnight when no one was around. Ellen seemed to have opted for the indoor bath.

The mansion was very quiet during the night.

-*Whoosh…*

I could hear the sound of the snowflakes in the distance.

A blizzard was knocking against the windows.

The place was by no means as spooky as Epiax, but I couldn't deny that it also had some eeriness to it.

I wanted to quickly go into my room to sleep, however, as I was about to enter it, I saw something.

There was someone near the window from where one could hear the snowstorm howling.

"…Charlotte?"

"Uh, Ah… Reinhardt?"

Charlotte turned her head towards me, slightly surprised when I called out to her.

"Why aren't you sleeping?"

Ellen and I were weirdos, so we wouldn't sleep until late into the night. Everyone else would usually be asleep.

"Oh, that's… Well… I mean… It's just… I wanted to watch the snow…?"

That was Charlotte's answer. If she just wanted to watch the snow, there were copious amounts of it falling from the sky, so she could have just watched it from her room, right?

"Really? Aren't you cold? You aren't even wearing any shoes."

Charlotte was even barefoot.

The mansion wasn't built to be walked in barefoot, and the place didn't even have the culture of walking around barefoot indoors. She stood there barefoot in the hallway despite all that.

"Ah, Well… It was dark…"

Charlotte rushed into her room, saying that she was tired and exhausted.

What was that about?

I stared at the door to Charlotte's room.

I went back to my room while wondering about if she was having trouble sleeping.

* * *

I managed to quickly solve the additional doubts I had about the ancient castle Epiax after returning from the group missions.

"Ah, you must have been to the Vampire Council."

"The Vampire Council?"

"Yes, it's a place where we held the council of house heads."

I went to Eleris' semi-basement apartment and asked her a few questions after I returned, and I immediately received an answer. She didn't even look that surprised.

Oh, so you went there?

That was what her reaction was like.

It sure was nice to have a vampire lord as an acquaintance, and a house head at that.

"Since all of its residents were evacuated when the Empire discovered it, it's probably not particularly dangerous for humans."

"Evacuated?"

What was she talking about?

"It was built in a place that would be difficult for humans to discover, but it had existed for a very long time already, so it was only a matter of time. It just happened."

The ancient castle Epiax had been deliberately built in the northernmost regions that were difficult for humans to traverse.

In fact, Glamos, which was located south from it, was the only inhabited area close to it, and there was still quite the stretch of uninhabited land between the castle and the small country.

But what I was focused on was the evacuation.

"No, that's not what I meant. I'm asking why you had to evacuate just because you were found by humans. You were just living there normally."

"If there were sightings of an unidentified ancient castle, adventurers would flock to it from everywhere, and if they went missing, they would dispatch their troops. War would have been inevitable, Your Highness. We opted to avoid all that trouble by simply emptying out the castle altogether. There weren't actually that many real residents of that castle."

I couldn't believe that they'd just abandoned their castle to avoid trouble.

Were all vampire lords pacifists like Eleris?

But it was still quite fascinating. Vampire lords should have been the most powerful among the vampires, but they'd just emptied their castle because some humans saw it.

They just abandoned their home and ran away…

* * *

"Hmm, it's kind of strange to hear that you just stepped down and abandoned your castle."

"Abandoned?"

Eleris tilted her head at my words.

"We still use it."

"…Huh? What do you mean?"

"It's not in an environment where humans can survive for a long time anyway, so it's left empty most of the time. We still gather there when necessary if there is no overlap."

The ancient castle Epiax had no human residents due to the extreme environment it was located in. The vampires had evacuated from it but still returned to Epiax whenever necessary.

There shouldn't have been many cases during which it was in use like during the group mission.

“You seem to think that we simply handed over the castle without thinking, but we didn’t.”

“Humans regularly go there to clean and manage the castle as if they are dealing with a precious relic. They seem to think that it’s a palace with great archaeological value. Well, it actually is a very old palace, so they aren’t wrong. They are even taking good care of the sculptures and decorations, worried that they might get damaged.”

“They maintain the building without needing to get paid. Like that, we can make use of the well-maintained palace whenever we need to.”

I gradually became more dumbfounded the more I listened.

The vampires didn’t actually hand over the unidentified ancient castle of Epiax to the humans.

Even though it was in such a strange environment, the humans took good care of the precious treasure that was actually a vampire castle and named it Epiax. They didn’t even know what kind of building it was.

“Humans tend to cherish property they believe to be theirs.”

Eleris smiled wryly. It seemed like she thought that the behavior of the humans was just so cute that she didn’t know what to do.

They’d handed it over because they wanted to avoid annoying situations, but the humans were taking even better care of it than they themselves had. They don’t even live in it or want to do anything specific with it.

Although it was quite eerie, it was still a grand and elegant palace, so they treated it with care as if they were handling a precious treasure they had just discovered.

So the vampires just watched on as the humans managed Epiax under the illusion that it was theirs.

They were essentially free slaves.

“It seems simple yet complicated.”

The ancient castle Epiax was co-owned by vampires and humans…

The Vampire Council…

There were five vampire clans, excluding Sunday and Monday.

It seemed like Eleris was a lot more powerful than an ordinary vampire lord as the head of the House of Tuesday.

However the other four heads and vampire lords certainly would be pretty strong as well.

Could they also become my power?

"Do you want the power of the other houses as well?"

I flinched at Eleris's gaze that seemed to see right through me.

Even though I thought that way for different reasons, Eleris wouldn't like seeing me crave for power.

"Just… just in case. It's not like I need them right now, but who knows? I might need them later on for some reason, right?"

"That would be difficult, Your Highness."

Eleris expressed that the endeavor would be difficult, contrary to her feelings.

"Of the vampire houses, no, even from my house, I was the only vampire lord who participated in the Great War."

Nearly all were absent.

I felt like gasping at Eleris's words.

"No, you said that you didn't like war, and yet you participated in the war while the others didn't?"

What kind of a bizarre situation was that? Eleris closed her eyes slightly, taking a slow, deep breath.

It looked like she was about to say something really important.

"Vampire lords were outside forces that weren't under the rule of the Demon King to begin with."

"Although some vampires, including myself, had vowed their allegiance to the Demon King, the Vampire Council was originally located outside of the Darklands, and the headquarters of the other houses were even located at the borders of the Darklands as well as the land of humans. Strictly speaking, rather than having betrayed His Majesty the Demon King, you can't think of them as allies to begin with."

They had never sworn allegiance to the Demon King in the first place, which was why they didn't have the slightest reason to participate in the war.

Some demon tribes living in the outskirts didn't participate in the Demon World War either, but that could be seen as a betrayal of loyalty.

However, what the Vampire Council did couldn't even be described with the word "betrayal". They weren't even allies.

The Vampire Council was a separate force not belonging to the demon realm or the human realm.

Besides, Eleris hated war. She had a very negative stance towards any kind of slaughter.

Only the Head of the House of Tuesday, the Vampire Lord Eleris, swore allegiance to the Demon King and participated in the Demon World War. Of course, I had no idea what she did before, but her job in the war had been being a spy, and that didn't seem to have produced many results.

It was Sarkegaar who'd actually carried out the kidnapping of the Imperial Princess.

Just why did Eleris swear allegiance to the Demon King?

No, in the first place…

Vampires were a type of undead.

However, being undead was actually a type of state.

That meant that being a vampire was also a ‘state’ and not a ‘race’.

Of course…

That would mean it was impossible to be born as a vampire.

So there had to have been a pre-vampire state as well.

“Eleris…”

“…Yes, Your Highness.”

“Before you became a vampire, were you human?”

“…”

Eleris looked at me silently.

“Yes, Your Highness.”

I had gained information about a new faction called the Vampire Council.

In addition to that, I also found out that Eleris had hidden many things.

I knew that she had some more secrets, but I decided not to pry out of respect.

“Well, fine. By the way, are you still attending the Vampire Council?”

“I have been absent for a while now, but I’m not on bad terms with them.”

“Hmm… I see. Got it.”

The Vampire Council…

I decided to keep their information in the back of my mind for the moment.

* * *

The Vampire Council…

They were a foreign force so to say. Although it was unknown what kind of relationship Eleris had with the current Vampire Council, it seemed like they were neither on friendly nor hostile terms with either humans or demons.

However, when humans discovered their palace, they chose to evacuate rather than fight them, so I thought they weren't some group of psychos that couldn't be communicated with.

Eleris had many secrets.

Why did she hate violence so much? Why did she swear allegiance to the Demon King?

What was she like before she became a vampire?

I had some guesses, but I wasn't sure if what I thought was the truth. I also didn't want to force her to spill the truth.

Eleris was on my side.

—As long as that was certain, everything else was secondary.

CHAPTER 236

The group mission was over.

It was October, and had the perfect weather fitting the season of fall. It was cold enough for us to wear our uniform jackets.

While our clothes had changed to winter clothes, not much changed from before. The biggest change was that the female students' stockings were changed to black.

The work I had to do for the Magic Research Society and my training with Ellen was back on track.

Unlike what Ellen feared, I wasn't going to be so busy that I wouldn't be able to train.

I would always have some time left, and I definitely thought that training myself was incredibly important.

So…

In other words, I could resume my early morning training again.

"Well."

No matter how long I waited at the main lobby of the dormitory early in the morning Adriana didn't show up. Perhaps it was because I hadn't exercised with her in such a long time. She had visited me a few times and thoroughly nagged me before that, though.

Still, the time I had been injured was just too long, so I kind of thought that she wouldn't be there and that I might have to do my early morning exercises alone, so I went on a run by myself.

Since I was all better, should I have told her that we could do the early morning training together again?

But what would she say to that?

‘So I have to?’

I could do it on my own, and so far, I had honestly been nothing but a hindrance to Adriana's training.

She never actually promised me that we would always do our training together, so even if she didn’t show up and worked out on her own separately, I couldn’t do anything about it.

But how should I put it?

I felt somewhat… disappointed.

Like that, I crossed Temple’s campus in the Fall at dawn.

“Hello, Reinhardt! Let’s do our best again today!”

Ah, Ludwig, that punk.

Just what was wrong with that guy so early in the morning?

In the end, as I would rather die than go with that guy, I went to the second-year dormitory in the morning after I finished my workout.

“Where's Adriana?”

“Erm. You’re asking where she is?”

I regularly talked with Redina due to the Magic Research Society, so I decided to ask her.

To be honest, she was the easiest to talk to.

I had been busy with the group mission up until then, so that was the first time we saw each other since then.

But why did she look at me like that?

“…She is dropping out.”

“……What?"

Redina's answer was outside of anything I could have imagined.

* * *

Adriana was dropping out…

It seemed like she had already left Temple.

Their group mission had ended on Friday, and like us, they were scheduled to rest at the mission venue until Sunday, and then they would return.

I was told that Adriana had asked to return early as soon as the mission was over.

However, as soon as they returned to Temple, Adriana seemed to have already disappeared.

That only confirmed the rumors that she had actually already informed the teachers of her intentions to drop out.

I was told that she had been consulting with the teachers about the matter for a long time by then.

Without telling a single one of her classmates, Adriana had been making preparations to leave Temple.

Of course, it was only natural that Redina was a lot more surprised about it than I was.

While she claimed that they were just good friends, she actually followed her around as if she were actually her older sister.

“What happened?"

“I… don't know…”

She said that the theme of the second-years’ group mission was ‘Escape’. After each of them was scattered across an artificially made labyrinth, each having different starting points, they were supposed to break through various traps and escape the

labyrinth while joining up with their classmates on the way.

It was Class A's victory, and that included Redina.

"I really don't know. She just… looked really upset throughout the whole mission."

She had been thinking about leaving Temple for a long time, but just what happened during the mission to trigger it?

Redina looked as if she was about to burst into tears.

Adriana had left Temple without explaining anything to anyone.

'If someone you think of as a precious friend suddenly wants to be more than just friends… What are you supposed to do…?'

Not long after our second semester started, Adriana had asked me something like that.

She had looked clearly concerned at the time.

Did the problem finally escalate?

Was that also something that happened in the fringes of the original novel?

I wasn't that sure. Adriana had been influenced by me too much.

However, as it might have been something that happened in the margins of the story, I couldn't be certain if it happened due to the butterfly effect.

"Never mind, do you know where she could have gone?"

I didn't like not knowing why Adriana decided to disappear from Temple.

* * *

It was Tuesday.

Adriana had disappeared on Friday right when the group mission was over after she returned to Temple.

She had no place to stay in the Imperial Capital, so the only place she could return to was the monastery she was born and raised in.

The Artowan Monastery of the Saint-Owan Duchy…

She had told me that it was the place she was born and raised in before.

The Saint-Owan Duchy was fortunately not too far away from the capital; it was home to both Harriet and Adriana.

After Tuesday's classes, I rushed out of Temple. I wasn't sure if I would be able to reach the Saint-Owan Duchy that day.

If it would take more than a day…

…I'd somehow manage. The disciplinary committee meeting was still on hold, but I could get away with skipping one day of classes with my one merit point!

If the disciplinary committee gave me a heavier punishment for committing such rule violations during my period of self-reflection…

I would have nothing to say.

Mr. Epinhauser would definitely stop me from leaving school.

There were some super-large warp gates located throughout the capital.

I asked Harriet some questions before I went out.

'The Artowan Monastery? Where's that?'

Harriet apparently didn't know where it was. As the young lady of the grand duchy, she couldn't possibly know every building in her territory, after all.

As such, I went to the Saint-Owan Duchy's capital, Arnaca, using a super-large warp gate. It was really fortunate that I only needed one transfer.

"Pass."

As I entered the super-large warp gate, I had a thought.

There were a number of them in the capital, so one got to use them right away, which was convenient.

The capital was somewhat special. In other cities, one had to wait for several days to even use one of those gates, you know?

So I could go through it right away there, but I would have to wait several days to use the gate to go back, right? I didn't even have the Imperial Coat of Arms or anything like it with me either that time, right?

I wouldn't just end up missing a single day, I might just skip the whole week, wouldn't I?

I can't do this now, can I?

"Ah, Aah?"

But my body had already been sucked into the super-large warp gate.

When I heard that Adriana had disappeared, I was too impatient to find her.

I felt like…

I didn't think things through well enough.

* * *

Adriana, who once sighed about the possibility that Olivia might quit Temple, was doing exactly that.

To say that one could never know what a person might go through would apply perfectly to that situation.

Anyway, I had reached a place I didn't think I would have to visit until the day before.

I thought that if I ever went to that place, it would be because of Harriet, not because of Adriana.

When I exited the warp gate, I was simply amazed by the scenery that greeted me.

Arnaca, the capital of the Saint-Owan Duchy, known for its highly developed magic.

It wasn't as grand as the Imperial Capital, but it was still a great city.

"What's this?"

I couldn't keep my mouth shut when I saw the vastness of the city and the tall castle standing right in the middle of it.

The surrounding area was completely flat, but there was a towering mountain right in the middle of it.

Then there was the palace that seemed to have been cut out of half of the mountain.

It seemed so bizarre and overwhelming that I was wondering just how something like that was possible.

A white palace carved out of a mountain…

It was the place Harriet mentioned from time to time.

The White Palace, Arnaria.

It was a beautiful and magnificent palace that seemed overwhelming, yet elegant.

"Dang, if they could do stuff like that, they could've just given me some money."

I knew that the Saint-Owan Duchy could be comparable to an average sized empire, but I didn't know it was to that degree.

As I realized while we were in the Ancient Castle Epiax, Harriet didn't just live in an average mansion, but in a big palace.

Just like there was a huge gap between a small apartment and a mansion, there was a gap between a mansion and a palace.

The latter was even more overwhelmingly different.

No matter how high one's status was, as long as one was a student at Temple, it didn't really show. After all, we were studying in the same environment, ate the same

food, shared the same classrooms, and met daily as if that was just normal.

However, seeing that palace that seemed gigantic even from afar was eye opening.

She…

She actually was a princess…

I felt slightly… sorry.

I decided that I would be a little… you know… nicer to her when I went back.

If one grew up in a place like that, growing up looking down on everyone around her, it was only natural that one would turn out pretty spoiled and rude.

It was no wonder for a kid like her, who had been treated with utter care like a precious treasure, to cry just because her cheeks were touched.

The more I saw just how beautiful Arnaca and Arnaria were…

The more I realized just how much Harriet had to tolerate and how hard it must have been for her.

Even so…

All through my hard work, our little idiot had become a lot cuter.

I decided to put my new appreciation of her on pause for the moment. I was curious what the inside of Arnaria looked like, but I had nothing to do there. I wasn't sure if Harriet might take me to visit it later, though.

I needed to find the Artowan Monastery.

* * *

The Artowan Monastery was, unfortunately, not located in the Duchy's capital.

It felt like I really had to start looking for her with no clues at all. If things were going to be like that, I was more than sure that I wouldn't be back by the next day.

Luckily, the Artowan Monastery wasn't located in some rural village without a warp gate. If that were the case, that would have cost a lot more time.

I found its location by asking at a temple of Towan that I decided to stop by.

I arrived at Elsion, another big city located in the Saint-Owan Duchy, after going through a medium-sized warp gate in Arnaca. I wasn't sure what kind of city it was, but it was certainly huge.

There were no such things as information desks there, so I had to ask around again as soon as I arrived there.

Mana trains only existed in the Imperial Capital, so I had to go there either by foot or by wagon.

Those were the only means of transportation in that city.

But shouldn't it have been possible to at least set up a tram or something?

"……"

So, after finding out the location of the Artowan Monastery, I stood up dejectedly.

A monastery wasn't the same as a church. It wasn't the kind of place believers usually frequented.

It appeared to be located outside of the city's bounds. Therefore, it would take a long time to get there, no matter if I decided to take a wagon or walk there.

That was when it hit me that I was actually living in a really nice place.

Mana trains…

Mana trains are really such a convenient invention…

With those thoughts flying through my mind, I started to walk diligently.

* * *

I didn't take a wagon; I didn't even know where to find one, and I'd just waste more

time simply looking for one.

I was quite confident in my stamina, so I walked through the streets of Elsion at a slightly faster pace, leaving the city.

I followed a road leading to the outskirts.

I never would have imagined that I would roam the outskirts of the Saint-Owan Duchy's first major city until that morning.

The day had already grown dark because the distance was just too overwhelming. While there was no sunlight, I had no problem distinguishing my surroundings due to the moonlight and the night vision my supernatural power could grant me.

I wondered what I would do if I came across a bandit or something, but I did have Tiamata. Even though it was a Holy Sword, it was more than capable of cutting through people with ease.

There shouldn't have been any problem, even if I met one, because I could just kill them.

I felt like I had become more and more unfamiliar to myself when I caught myself having such thoughts so casually.

Even walking a few kilometers at quite a fast pace wasn't a problem for my level of stamina. I wasn't injured anymore, either.

I became quite a different person, qualitatively speaking, compared to how I was in my first semester.

The one who contributed the most to that was Ellen, followed by Adriana.

However, if we went by who helped me out first, that would be Adriana.

I was the type of person that no one could see in a positive light. I'd used cowardly and shameful methods to make my senior step down after I got beat up.

And yet Adriana had tried to talk to me, even though I seemed to be nothing but troublesome.

And she even helped me to put up a fight in the duel I recklessly agreed to.

Although the reason I gave her for acting the way I did was that if I didn't go that far, my classmates would bully me for being a weakling.

Adriana was someone who would even reach out her hand to someone one would be better off not touching like me.

She was the first one to help me.

She kept working out with me and never stopped helping me become someone that could be described as a person.

She had helped me even before Ellen.

I didn't know what happened, but I really wanted to know why Adriana needed to leave Temple so badly.

I could see a building on top of a hill at the end of the road from a distance.

There were no other buildings around, so I was sure that it was the Artowan Monastery.

* * *

The term "ancient castle" suited that place much better than Epiax.

Epiax seemed like a palace built in a splendid and sophisticated architectural style, so it didn't feel rough or rugged. Of course, the scenery of the snow garden surrounding it gave it an eerie and gloomy atmosphere.

The enormous but barren appearance of the monastery before me seemed to reflect the ascetic lifestyle of the people living in it.

Monks living in monasteries were different from priests residing in ordinary churches, which were open to the public.

They were people who solely focused on their own religious practices and cultivation rather than how they appeared to the public. They were a community of faithful people walking their own religious paths while keeping their distance from

the secular world.

A monastery was a place where such nuns and monks lived.

Adriana had grown up in the Artowan Monastery.

So it would be a convent, so to speak.

Which meant…

-This is an area that is off-limits for men.

“No, wait!”

-We will never open the doors for you.

Men weren’t allowed to set foot in convents.

CHAPTER 237

Other than its walls, one couldn’t see anything else of the Atrowan Convent from outside, maybe it was to minimize the chances of the nuns living there being seen.

I couldn’t even see how the interior was set up. All of it could simply be the convent, but there might be something like a garden in the middle.

When I arrived at the front door and said that I was there looking for someone, instead of opening it for me, they just slid open a small slit. only exposing their eyes, and simply told me that it was an area forbidden for men.

I’d gone there as quickly as possible, so I had expected some twists and turns.

While I was pretty certain that it would take some time to get back and such, I never expected that I would never even be able to enter the convent.

-Bang, bang!

“Hey! I won't enter, but could you please call Adriana for me!? If you tell her that I'm her junior from Temple and that I want to talk for a bit, I'm sure she'll come out! "

-… Sister Adriana said that she isn't willing to meet anyone from Temple. Go back.

I couldn't believe that she didn't want to see anyone from Temple.

What the hell happened?

“Whatever, just tell her what I said. Are all nuns of Towan so unfriendly?"

-…

I didn’t hear any more words from beyond the door for a while.

…Did I cross the line by referring to all of the nuns of Towan?

-What is your name?

“I'm Reinhardt."

-Don't hope for a positive answer.

“Anyway, thank you. "

It seemed like the nun left. I leaned my back against the massive, tall walls of the convent as I blankly stared at the moonlit sky.

What should I do…?

There was the thing with Adriana as well.

I felt like I’d made a big mistake again.

I had been in a hurry, so I wasn’t really able to tell anyone where I had gone.

What if they already found out that I suddenly disappeared again? If Temple got thrown into chaos again… I seriously risked getting beaten up by Ellen… I should have said something.

Did I actually lose my mind when I heard that Adriana dropped out from school?

I just up and left without a trace.

What should I tell them when I get back?

No, I should have just gone back as soon as possible. Just how long would I have to queue up for the warp gate? Being a Temple student didn’t help in the least.

After some time, a smaller gate beside the main gate slowly opened.

“…Junior.”

From there, Adriana, wearing a miserable expression, stepped out.

* * *

Adriana was dressed in a neat, black and white, monastic outfit that suited her quite well.

She also looked good in her Temple uniform, though.

The time I'd first met her, I'd thought she was quite the modern beauty, but looking at her at the convent…

Should I have called the style clean or neat?

It did seem like a very good fit for Adriana, who was always proper.

Adriana, who said that she wouldn't meet anyone from Temple, came out when she heard that it was me.

"I didn't actually want to come out, but I didn't know… what you might've ended up doing otherwise, junior…"

I didn't expect that my reputation of doing crazy things outside of anyone's expectations would help me there.

Adriana showed various facial expressions, perhaps because she was having a hard time.

"What about Temple?"

In the midst of that, she voiced her concerns.

"That's not important right now."

While I was worried about that as well, she was more important to me for the moment. The grass around the monestary on the hillside, turning brown, swayed in the wind.

"Let's walk for a bit."

Adriana slowly took the lead, and I walked beside her.

She, who was always so enthusiastic about training, looked nothing like that in her monastic attire. She had an atmosphere around her that told the world that she didn't know how to fight and that she would go her whole life without knowing.

"Well, I thought you might come here, Junior."

“Is that so?"

“Yeah, you're just too nosy after all, Junior."

I had stuck my nose into the business of others more than just once or twice, after all.

That was probably why she thought in a corner of her mind that I would go to see her, even in that situation.

“That's not a very nice way to put it."

“I didn't intend it to be nice after all."

Adriana smiled widely.

“So, why would you drop out of Temple?"

“It's just the result of something I've been thinking about for some time."

“Didn't something happen during the group mission?"

“…It did, but I kind of expected something like that to happen. Of course, it felt a lot different when it actually happened."

Adriana seemed to be burdened with a lot of troubles.

During our summer vacation, she seemed to have been struggling with something that she ended up making her mind up about during the mission.

It looked like there was someone among her classmates who liked her, but she suffered because of it, as she couldn't reciprocate their feelings.

“Art told me that he liked me."

Adriana looked at me as she spoke.

Art de Gartis… The second-year who’d challenged me to a duel.

So it was that guy who liked Adriana, huh?

“I said I couldn't accept his feelings."

“…What did that guy do to you?"

Adriana shook her head sadly at my words.

“He didn't do anything. Art isn't that violent, Junior."

They argued.

“I just thought that I shouldn't be in Temple any more after that. That's it."

“That was enough for you to decide to leave Temple?"

Adriana paused for a moment and looked at me.

“Junior.”

She looked quite depressed.

“This happened more than once."

Adriana told me that she had gone through something similar to the Orbis Class.

Art wasn't the only problem, she had been through those things too often.

Was she just tired of it? Adriana silently looked at the monastery.

“Junior, I've grown up and lived here all my life."

And then we started talking about something completely different.

The Artowan Convent…

An area that was off-limits for men.

* * *

“Some of the people who live in the monastery, that is, the Artowan Convent, live their whole lives there. Those people never even see a man until the day they die.

When orphans are entrusted to the convent at a very young age, it's not all that impossible."

It seemed like there were actually some people who had never seen someone of the opposite sex in their whole life in the monastery.

Assuming that they wouldn't go outside for the rest of their life…

Wouldn't that mean that they would lock themselves in that prison for their whole life?

I couldn't understand why one would live like that. Adriana shook her head, seeming to understand my doubts.

"There are simply people who are more than satisfied with this way of life. Rather than being filled by worldly desires, a life dedicated to their faith and self-cultivation is a lot more satisfying for them."

It was possible for some people to happily live in that huge but narrow prison for their whole lives, abandoning many of their human desires.

Why did Adriana tell me something like that?

“Junior, I left the monastery for the first time last year."

Adriana hadn’t gone to Temple's elementary school section, but she had entered the Royal Class straight away. That meant that she’d lived in the monastery for 17 years and left it for the first time the year before.

"It was the first time I saw a man after living in a world filled with religious doctrine, interpretations, and prayer. I met people who had completely different opinions from me and held completely different values."

Adriana walked quietly through the brown, moonlit meadow.

Her walk seemed soft.

Adriana was like a wanderer.

She didn't know what her destination was, but she kept walking, trying to find

something.

“I learned a lot of things… That there are so many different people in the world, that there are so many silly things in the world, that there is so much delicious food in the world, and that there are so many interesting and fun things in the world. The world is filled with so much joy and misfortune. The world…”





“The world…”

“The world is so beautiful."

Adriana looked up at the sky.

“Indeed. I also learned that there were many sad things in this world I had never experienced before, but I found a lot more fun and happy things filling it."

She seemed delighted that the world she’d found outside of the confines of the convent was so beautiful.

“I wanted to get along with everyone, so I tried to be kind to everyone. However, there were a few people who misunderstood my intentions. No, it couldn’t even be called a misunderstanding. I didn’t know when treating someone as a friend ended and when acting like I was interested in someone started.”

Adriana, in her early days after her admission, seemed to have been similar to Ellen and yet different.

Ellen didn’t know how to act around people, so she avoided them.

Adriana didn’t know how to act around people, so she was simply nice and kind to everyone.

She might have overdone it a little.

“So things like that happened a few times. If someone confessed to me, I would refuse them and tell them something like, “Don’t you know that I can’t do these things because I’m a priest of Towan?” which always made them hate me. They would ask me why I had treated them so well and led them on.”

What she did just to get close to the people around her made some people misunderstand her intentions, so it seemed like Adriana had her fair share of troubles, even outside of Royal Class, during her first year.

Although she seemed to have gotten hurt in those situations, Adriana had tried to draw a clear line between her and others.

However, even so, there was nothing one could do about the heart's desires.

Art liked Adriana.

He confessed, and in the end, tired of repeating that endless circle, Adriana had decided to drop out of Temple.

"That's not the end of it. There are even people who like the people who confess to me, and those people grow to hate me and become jealous with me, striking out by plaguing me with terrible gossip."

Adriana's eyes were shaking.

She didn't know whether that might be true for Art as well.

She couldn't accept Art's feelings, but someone else might like him, then that person would definitely hate Adriana.

What were those terrible rumors that she was talking about though?

She didn't even bother to tell me what they were, but just even mentioning the fact that they existed was hard for her. It looked like the rumors must have been dirty.

Adriana was struggling.

I wasn't aware of any of that.

"There were a lot of things I wasn't aware of, and there are still many more. I was trying to do better, but it just wasn't going well."

Adriana, who seemed to be good at everything and got along with everyone, was actually unhappy.

I was actually older than her, but I still was wrong about her.

She was a senior to me, so I just thought Adriana was the type of person who was good at everything as if she was actually my senior…

She was a good person, so I believed that she would be able to take care of herself well, too.

However, she was actually having such a hard time dealing with people without my knowledge. Thinking about how to get along with others, acting the best she could, and sometimes failing.

She was hurting.

"When I lived in the convent, I was satisfied with just that because it was my whole world. I didn't know anything but that world."

However, Adriana had to have changed after she'd found out about the outside world and all the things she had no idea about before.

"There's so much going on in the world. There are things that need someone to step in, and I thought that I might be the one to do so. If I was told to go back to living the rest of my life in the convent, I probably wouldn't be able to. That's what I'm thinking, at least. Of course, I don't have to, either. The director also wants me to see even more of the world."

Adriana wasn't actually forced to be a nun either.

"At first, I was able to endure because my goal was to join the Knights Templar. I planned on simply enduring through those problems that arose from interhuman relations and graduate from Temple. I believed the reason for my life to be to join the Knights Templar and fight for the greater good."

Adriana had wanted to join the Knights Templar. She'd admired them so much that she'd gone to see them in-person when they'd returned from the Darklands.

"However, I don't know anymore. Olivia gave up her faith, and the commander of the Knights Templar even tried to torture his own daughter. When I learned of these things… I wasn't so sure anymore if that was really the right path…"

That was also the result of the butterfly effect caused by my actions.

Adriana, who was enduring all those problems caused by human relations and had the goal of joining the Knights Templar, had found out that the Knights Templar weren't actually as ideal as she thought they were.

Olivia had given up on her faith, and while Adriana had not, she was still in agony.

She had been suffering all that time because of it.

Since her life goal was gone, did she believe that there was no reason for her to endure her life at Temple that was wrought with trouble?

“So I just decided to stay in this convent for the rest of my life.”

She was tired of trying to maintain all those relationships with the people around her.

Amidst all the interest she was subject of and the malice and hatred resulting from it, she eventually tried to return to where she’d started.

“I don’t want to know anymore things unknown to me, so I just want to go back to where I came from and to the life I lived before.”

There was no reason for her to stay in Temple, where she had to suffer from misunderstanding and miscommunication, after her goal had disappeared.

She saw Olivia abandoning her faith…

She learned a lot of things she didn’t want to know…

Did she choose to go back to the convent before she learned even more she didn’t want to know?

Adriana looked at me.

“I told Art that I couldn’t and shouldn’t like him, that I couldn’t do it, and that I felt really sorry, but I couldn’t accept his feelings. I used the same excuse I always used. I always say those words when I reject someone.”

Her eyes seemed sad.

“It’s not Art’s fault. It’s not the fault of the people who fell for me, either. It’s probably my fault. I wasn’t able to put the right distance between us, so people misunderstood… All lf it was probably my fault for acting in such a manner.”

It wasn't her fault, either.

I wanted to tell her that, but I couldn't open my mouth.

After running away, she was deprecating herself.

She didn't hate anyone, but she hated herself.

"Junior…"

She quietly looked at me.

"You can't be friends with everyone."

That sounded like a warning from someone who had already failed.

Don't do it.

Don't even dream about it.

Something like that.

—That was the kind of warning it was, and words were filled with her own regrets.

Adriana…

Adriana, who suffered so much just by being in Temple…

I couldn't possibly ask her to return to Temple.

CHAPTER 238

Adriana sat still in the brown meadow.

When she asked me to sit next to her, I sat down beside her.

It was chilly, but I didn't feel that cold.

"It would have been nice if everyone else was like you."

Someone who didn't show any greater interest in her, even when in such close proximity to her…

Adriana wanted to be friends with everyone, so someone like me would have been perfect for that.

Not everyone could be like me, and not everyone could be like Adriana.

—So it was an impossible dream.

Someone would still confess while knowing full well that they would get rejected because they just couldn't hold it in anymore, and if people who liked those people actually saw all that, they would harbor great malice.

What should one do if a friend saw you as more than just a friend?

Adriana's words at that time hid deep worries.

I didn't care that much at the time because I was busy with my own problems, but could I have prevented the problem from cropping up if I had paid more attention to her?

But what the hell was I supposed to do to prevent it?

"You might think I'm quitting Temple for such a small problem."

"It's not like it's not a big deal though."

It may have sounded trivial, but if it was so painful for her, why should she have to endure it? Even after she endured all that, there would be nothing to reward her for it at the end.

I'd wondered why Adriana had suddenly dropped out of Temple.

I wanted to tell her to come back if she could.

I had to stay in Temple, but Adriana had no reason to.

I couldn't persuade Adriana or find any reason for her not to stay in the monastery.

I didn't know if it was best for Adriana to stay there.

However, Adriana, who had suffered through so much in Temple, seemed to have no other path left.

"Thank you for understanding."

Adriana looked at me with a sad smile.

I wanted to comfort her, but I didn't know what to say to her.

However…

I had a certain problem…

I was in the outskirts of Elsion.

I arrived there through a medium-sized warp gate…

A warp gate through which monsters would eventually emerge as well.

Waves of carnage would occur in almost every city save the Imperial Capital.

If I couldn't stop the Gate Crisis, Adriana would inevitably die there.

As Adriana said, you couldn't be friends with everyone.

I wouldn’t be able to save everyone either.

I really wished there was a way to do that, but I didn’t know if there even was one.

Was it really right to leave Adriana there when the future is so uncertain?

That thought didn’t last long.

If I couldn’t stop the Gate Incident, I might as well have just smashed Elsion’s warp gate to bits.

Or I could’ve made Adriana somehow stay in Temple.

However, that was still far away.

Adriana had made her choice, and I couldn’t deny it.

It wasn’t the end of everything.

It was a place I could reach in a day, so there was no reason for me not to go back to visit.

“I’ll visit you often.”

“…”

"Redina was also very worried about you. I could bring her…”

Adriana looked at me.

Redina…

Adriana looked like she was about to cry when that name came out of my mouth.

Just like Redina followed her around as if she was her real sister, she seemed to regret and feel sorry for leaving her behind.

“Thank you, Junior… No, you aren’t my junior anymore.”

Adriana smiled at me on that moonlit hill.

“Thank you. Reinhardt.”

“…”

I sighed.

“I’m more grateful to you.”

That person who felt grateful to me even though I did nothing…

I was going to leave her there for the time being.

However, I would definitely go back and pick her up later.

—That was what I swore.

* * *

Adriana left Temple, and she would never come back again.

That was a failure.

However, while it felt like a failure, it also didn’t.

Adriana saw me off that day when we returned to the far reaches of the fields.

I might not have been able to convince Adriana to return to Temple, but I could go and see her again from time to time.

I would bring Redina next time as well.

I left the Artowan Monastery with those thoughts in mind.

“Goodbye, Reinhardt."

"Yeah."

Seeing Adriana wave her hand, complicated thoughts swirled in my head.

She was the one who'd laid the foundation for my life at Temple. I knew that it wasn't like I would never be able to see her again, but I couldn't seem to take a step.

'You can't be friends with everyone.'

Adriana's words were burned into my mind.

* * *

I had to go back to Temple.

It was already past midnight.

Adriana told me that she would stay in the monastery, and I decided to stop thinking about whether it was the right thing for her to do or not.

I was done tending to other people's affairs, so I had to take care of my own matters.

Then, my next problem…

I had to do my very best to return to Temple that day.

[Quest appeared - Return]

[Description : Return to Temple before classes begin]

[Reward : 200 Achievement Points]

A small quest appeared.

In the end, I could have skipped a single day, but then there was that small quest giving me 200 achievement points.

But I didn't think I would be able to return that day.

First, I had to go to Arnaca using Elsion's warp gate and return to the Imperial

Capital by using Arnaca's super-large gate.

It was nothing difficult.

But how would I be able to go through that super-large warp gate with such a huge queue in front of it?

"Damnit…"

I sighed softly in front of Elsion's medium warp gate.

If the others found out that I made such a stupid mistake, I might really get beaten up.

What was more important than those achievement points…

If Ellen found out that I was gone, she might've let her imagination run wild again, so if that were to happen, I might've actually gotten killed.

If she were to ask me why I didn't tell her anything, I wouldn't have anything to say to her.

Wait for me!

I'm coming back!

I might be a bit late, though…

* * *

When I arrived in Arnaca, the capital of the Saint-Owan Duchy, a brilliant night view unfolded before me.

The Saint-Owan Duchy, in which magic was extremely advanced.

Still, there were no extremely large magic-powered facilities like the mana train of the Imperial Capital, but Arnaca itself was a bright city with an excellent night view.

My mind went blank for a moment when I saw the majestic sight of Arnaria, the

Duchy's palace, shining white in the distance.

The Imperial Capital also had its own charms, but Arnaca was a city filled with a mysterious and magical atmosphere.

They didn't have trains, but there were trams everywhere as well. It didn't seem that it had been long since they were implemented, though.

That wasn't the time to admire the city's scenery.

That horrendously long queue before the super-large warp gate…

Just what should I do about it…?

I headed towards the gate at dawn. Arnica was wide, so I took a tram that even ran at dawn.

There were three super-large warp gates in Arnaca. That was quite amazing. As a territory specialized in magic, their warp gates, which could be considered super-large magic facilities, connected to many places.

I didn't even have to check those three different places. Seeing that the queue merged into a single big one, I was convinced that it was pretty much impossible for me to get back that day.

They'd probably arrived very early and stood in line after receiving a waiting ticket beforehand. Those that I saw before me were not the full extent of the people who wanted to use the gates.

It was like that even in the early morning hours just after midnight.

I had no choice but to be stranded there in Arnaca for a few days. I had some money, and I was sure that there were various places where I could sleep, but the others would also end up finding out that I was missing all of a sudden like last time.

A way…

It sure felt great when I was able to use the Imperial Coat of Arms as a sort of fast pass.

How could I make them prioritize me in the use of the extra-large warp gate?

“Erm…”

I had no choice but to visit a certain place.

The White Palace, Arnaria…

It’s not like they would prioritize me for being a Temple student that was part of the Royal Class.

However, that was Arnaca, the capital of the Saint-Owan Duchy.

Wouldn’t they be able to do something for me as a friend of the Duchy’s young lady?

* * *

I had to go to the White Palace Arnaria and ask for a warp gate priority ticket.

I also thought that it was a crazy plan.

Even though he was the father of a close friend, he was the Grand Duke of Saint-Owan, the master of the duchy, basically a king.

The time was also an issue.

I could anticipate how I would get cursed out if I really woke him up in the early morning hours, asking him to use the warp gate first.

How strange…

I was afraid of getting hit by Ellen, so I was actually thinking about going up to the ruler of a territory to make a racket.

Just what the hell was I doing?

Still, my feet still took me in the palace’s direction.

Achievement points were at stake, and it would determine whether I would get killed by Ellen or not.

I had to go back to Temple before the sun rose any further!

If he said no, I couldn't do anything about it, but if he said yes, that would be great.

After some time, I confidently headed towards Arnaria.

The White Palace…

A mysterious yet beautiful palace that seemed as if it had been carved out of half the mountain it was placed on…

Its walls and its five tall spires rising from them were glowing white.

The spires should have had some magical function, but I didn't really know what it was.

There seemed to be four gates—one to the east, one to the west, one to the north, and one to the south. I headed towards the southern gate.

If I got past that gate, I would be able to get to the palace by taking those steep marble stairs.

In front of that gate…

"What is your business?"

"Speak."

There were two guards, who seemed to be human but spoke a bit unnaturally, blocking my path.

They talked as if they were one person. The way they were armed and how they behaved was very natural, yet I felt a strange sense of incongruity when I looked at them.

They were golems.

That place was highly advanced in the study of magic, that was its setting, so they let golems that looked exactly like humans protect the palace.

They could be compared to an automatic security system, for example. That was a good call. One wouldn't have to worry about them betraying you nor would they get tired, because they weren't human.

"My name is Reinhardt, a student of Temple's Royal Class. I'm also a friend of Harriet de Saint-Owan."

The golems didn't change their expressions at my words. What was before me were machines that only worked as ordered.

"I want to be prioritized when using the super-large warp gate."

The golems were silent.

About 30 minutes or so passed.

The guards carefully stepped away from me.

-Creeeeaaak…

Then the huge gate began to open.

"This is a message of the Grand Duke."

"Come in."

"Reinhardt."

It wasn't just two golems.

It seemed like there was even a network-like system in place.

It was surprisingly easy to enter, so I was a bit flustered.

This is fine, right?

* * *

After crossing the gate, I went up the steep stairs leading to the palace, the golem guards walking beside me.

It seemed that the Grand Duke could receive reports and give orders through those golems rather than just "programming" them to do something. If it was just about the warp gate license, he could have just given me an answer like that, but he'd asked me to come in.

I had never personally met the Grand Duke of Saint-Owan before.

He was a crazy fool for his daughter.

I didn't know what sort of impression he had of me, but it probably wasn't a good one.

As I climbed up the marble stairs, I could see the White Palace more closely.

It wasn't similar to the ancient castle Epiax at all. Of course, it was a little bigger, and if Epiax gave off a sharp, rough feeling, that place felt warm and soft.

Even though it was night, I could see the well-maintained gardens lit up by multiple lights everywhere.

There were people still working in the numerous annexes and central palaces even though it was the middle of the night; maybe they were golems as well.

Although I had never been to the Imperial Palace Emperatos, I felt certain that Arnaria, the White Palace, was absolutely one of the most beautiful places on the continent.

Just what would it be like to live in a place like that?

I thought it might be a little boring, actually.

There were golems no matter where I looked. The expressionless faces of the golems gave off a certain reliability, but…

It seemed a bit lonely.

None of the staff or servants were human probably, but there certainly were a few

humans around.

Harried lived in that kind of place.

I suddenly thought that her childhood must have been very lonely. Wherever she went, there were only golems and no friends to play with.

—Just as Adriana had been content with her life at the convent and accepted that she would live her whole life there as she didn't know anything else.

Since Harriet was also content living her whole life in that white palace, not knowing any other way of life, she probably didn't really complain about being lonely, right?

Even at dawn, the White Palace, where golems could be seen working everywhere, wasn't quiet.

However, no one looked at me nor did anyone try to talk to me.

From afar, the White Palace seemed to be a beautiful and vibrant building.

However, when I went inside, I could only see the White Palace as a lonely place. It was still beautiful and brilliant, but very lonely.

As I was led to one side of the palace while accompanied by the guard, I walked through the garden, where no one tried to restrain me or try to talk to me.

I didn't feel like I was about to have an audience at all.

I was led to the palace where the Grand Duke's bedroom was located.

It had a main reception room and a central lobby.

"…"

I thought I would just meet the Grand Duke there.

Of course, he was actually there. He sat on a fancy sofa, staring at me with a tea set placed before him.

"Long time no see, Reinhardt."

Seeing him like that, it was more than clear that I had woken him up. He looked quite sloppy.

No, that made me even more aware of how rude I was acting, but the Grand Duke, the ruler of a territory, actually woke up at dawn as soon as he heard that I'd come.

Yeah, well, okay. Let's say that was possible.

"So you are Reinhardt? Oh my… Oh my, oh my…"

An elegant and beautiful lady.

"No, I was told he was ugly. Aren't you actually handsome?"

Some young man.

"You're right."

Some young man two.

"He is handsome, but he certainly looks dirty."

Some young man three.

"Sit down," The Grand Duke commanded.

I sat on the sofa opposite him, feeling cold sweat run down my body.

What the hell was going on?

Apparently, the whole Saint-Owan family had gathered here.

"I've heard a lot about you."

The lady who wore a kind smile offered me some tea.

She was probably Harriet's mother.

I…

Why?

No, I…

I just need the gate prioritization.

That was the reason for being there.

“How are things with Harriet?”

Why did it feel like I was visiting my girlfriend’s house for the first time?

Did they think of me as her boyfriend or something?

Was it something like that?

“G-g… Good! H-How are you doing?!”

And why the heck was I responding to that?

I might have gone crazy!

CHAPTER 239

The situation turned into something similar to a boyfriend visiting his girlfriend's parents' house to say hello without his girlfriend.

No, it wasn't like that.

It wasn't like they were just awake, it was clear that the whole family had woken up as soon as they'd heard that I was there.

The Grand Duke had seen me once, but it seemed like the other family members also wanted to see my face at least once.

"My sweetie talks about you so much. At first it seemed like you two didn't get along at all, but now it seems like you have gotten very close."

The lady wore a subtle smile as she looked at me.

I didn't know her name, but I believed her to be Harriet's mother. If Harriet grew older, she might end up looking like that as well.

Yeah, she just had to grow up a bit more. Of course, I didn't know if she would be as gentle as her.

And young men one, two, and three…

I guessed that they were the brothers Harriet talked about from time to time.

"Your face does look like you're always pretending like you're not up to something. Now I see it."

The first of her presumed brothers seemed a little mischievous.

"No, it's even more interesting that he doesn't care about our status at all? Is he that thick-skinned?"

The second presumed brother seemed to be strangely blunt with his words.

“No, it’s not that, but I heard he’s quite skilled, right?”

No, why did it seem like those guys were asking for a show or something all of a sudden?

I went there to talk about the warp gate prioritization, but I couldn’t bring myself to say anything because the ducal family was making so much noise.

I’d thought that it was a lonely place, but the owners of Arnaria were like…

“Try this, Reinhardt, it’s delicious.”

Dogs…

No, I didn’t mean that in a bad way.

They were a bit like puppies. I was a strange sight to them, so it seemed like they were wagging their tails at me, crowding around me and trying to sniff me.

They seemed like very friendly puppies.

What was that? I was supposed to be a beggar.

I didn’t feel any sort of prejudice from those people at all. What the hell?

Even those people…

They seemed to be completely convinced that Harriet and I weren’t just friends but were actually dating.

They didn’t even ask if we were dating…

Well, of course they’re dating, is there any problem with that?

It felt like they were thinking like that.

I couldn’t even tell them that it wasn’t the case because they didn’t ask

What was with that?

If I were her first boyfriend, shouldn't they hate my guts? Why didn't they hate me? I think I would definitely hate me, though.

Ah. The Grand Duke seemed to have that kind of expression.

His expression seemed to represent 'dissatisfaction' itself.

"Ah. Erm, Yes… It… it's very delicious…"

I nodded with a stiff expression on my face as Mrs. Saint-Owan forced me to eat a cookie.

The Saint-Owan brothers only talked a bit, but they didn't seem to show any reluctance towards me. The Grand Duke was silent while the others were asking me questions.

"You're a supernatural power user, right? Can you show it to me once?"

"Well, it's a skill that can't be really shown, though…"

"Oh yeah? What kind of power is it?"

"It's called self-suggestion… It's a bit like physical strengthening. Well, I'm not actually sure if I'm the only one who actually feels the effect."

"I heard you were able to strengthen yourself with mana last time. All on your own?"

"Really? Reinhardt, you're a genius!"

Idiot…

Did she tell her family everything she knew about me…?

I was able to punch anyone in their face who tried to start something with me, but I felt helpless because they were clinging to me like pet dogs.

I was weak against those kinds of things.

In the end, I suffered through their interrogation for a long time.

“Ehm.”

The Grand Duke coughed slightly and pointed to the stairs using his chin.

“Once you’re done talking, go back to your bedrooms.”

Perhaps thinking that the curiosity of his family members had been sufficiently sated, the Grand Duke seemed to try to cut them off.

Mrs. Saint-Owan took my hand.

“I’d really like to talk a bit more with you. Can’t you sleep over? It’s very late.”

N-no.

That older version of Harriet…

Her personality was totally different from hers, so I couldn’t seem to get used to it!

“Ah, n-no. I have to get back to Temple by morning…”

“What a shame… Do come to see me often later with Harriet.”

Eventually, after saying that, she moved her mouth closer to the side of my head.

“By the way…”

“Don’t make my sweetie cry anymore, my dear.”

“How many times did you do that already?”

“Be careful from now on, okay?”

“She is a lot more vulnerable than you think.”

A chill ran down my spine. The look in the eyes of Mrs. Saint-Owan and the three brothers as she said those things to me seemed to change slightly.

A family crazy for its only daughter…

If I made Harriet sad, they would kill me in the world's most painful way.

I had already made Harriet cry a few times; probably around the beginning of the first semester.

The Grand Duke and his family had opened up the gates of the White Palace and welcomed a commoner who showed up at dawn out of nowhere.

They favored me because I was friends with Harriet. However, there seemed to have been a misunderstanding.

If I were to make Harriet sad, the undeserving favor that they showed me would turn into disproportionate hatred and revenge.

Idiot…

Your family…

Is really scary…

Regardless of whether I was discovered as the Demon Prince or not, I believed I would be killed by her family first…

* * *

The Grand Duke's family didn't ask me why I was in Arnaca.

They were just very curious about what kind of person I was, so all of them had woken up when I'd showed up at their doorstep out of nowhere and asked me various questions before going back to their rooms at the Grand Duke's order to stop and go back to sleep, seeming disappointed.

It was just me and the Grand Duke left in the reception room.

The others had made quite the fuss about me, however the Grand Duke was the only one who'd watched me calmly.

"Priority to use the super-large warpgate… Indeed, I can give you something of that degree."

He wrote up a document on the spot and handed it to me as if it wasn't really a difficult request.

"Thank you, Your Highness."

The Grand Duke didn't ask me why I was there that late. Was it that he didn't think that anything special had happened?

I was more or less sure that he simply wasn't curious about what someone of low status like me was up to.

I could go back since I was done with my business, but it would be incredibly rude if I got up first before he told me that I could go.

I had already shown him great disrespect, and yet he'd met me with favor.

I couldn't be even ruder to the Grand Duke.

And…

While I didn't really have a reason to leave a good impression, I certainly didn't want to leave a bad one.

What the hell was I doing? I wasn't her boyfriend!

But I didn't have to be rude towards him just because I wasn't, right? Just what was I supposed to do?

"Go."

The Grand Duke rose from his seat, and I followed behind him. When I first met him, he'd said something like "You don't like Harriet? Is there something wrong with your

eyes?”

The Grand Duke at that moment looked a lot more serious than he did back then.

The Grand Duke and I walked through the Arnaria gardens.

“I heard you created a magic research group.”

“Ah, yes.”

“I heard you plan on making some crazy things.”

“Yes.”

The Grand Duke of Saint-Owan walked quietly through the silent garden. It seemed like he wanted to talk to me. He didn’t ask me why I was there and only asked some things about Temple.

“It’ll be impossible.”

The Grand Duke had refused when Harriet asked him to invest in us. It looked like they’d fought because of that.

The Grand Duke of Saint-Owan, an archmage… If someone like that said something was impossible, then it was impossible.

Generally speaking, that was true.

I was the only one who knew that they would create those things in the future, so the Grand Duke’s prediction was wrong. With his back still turned towards me, the Grand Duke kept on talking.

“You don’t know anything about magic. People who don’t know the theory behind magic think that anything is possible with magic, so they ask for a lot of things. You don't know what mana is composed of, how to draw magic circles, or what magic circles can and cannot be carved into magic stones. You think everything can just be solved with this thing called magic. People like that are generally known as magic all-roundists. "

His words were filled with criticism directed towards me, however, it sounded a bit different somehow.

It felt like a battle between a head of a development team and a head of a planning team.

'Make something like this.'

'How the hell are we supposed to make that?'

'You will manage somehow. You guys are good with computers, right? Isn't that what you are getting paid to do?'

'No, you should research first before you speak about these things. This isn't as easy as it seems.'

'Last time you also said that you wouldn't be able to do it, but you still somehow made it. Just do it like that again.'

No! This is different from that, right?

Or was it actually a version of that?

However, the Grand Duke didn't seem like he was complaining.

“By the way…”

“…Yes?”

“All world-changing inventions actually started off with the opinion of an outsider like that."

The Grand Duke quietly walked forward.

“Emperor Regnet de Gradias ordered the creation of a uniform and universal large-scale means of transportation using magic because of the constant traffic jams and accidents due to the sheer number of carriages driving around in the Imperial Capital. The Emperor had not an inkling about magic. It was impossible. Everyone said it was utterly impossible to create something like that. They ridiculed the Emperor's judgment and criticized him, calling him a magic all-roundist who was

completely ignorant of magic."

“But today, there are mana trains driving through the Imperial Capital."

“And another 150 years earlier, Emperor Organtia de Gradias said that teleportation magic was much too rare compared to its usefulness, so he said that we should connect each region by applying dimensional doors used in the field of summoning to create permanent dimensional doors. However if they were supposed to be permanent portals and spread across the entire continent like a spider web, how would we supply the stones needed to power them? Cost problems, technological problems, implementation problems… everything from start to finish was filled with problems. It was a ridiculous thing to suggest. Everyone criticized the idea and called it impossible. They lamented the impending ruin of the Empire."

“However at present, the warp gate system has been established over the whole continent."

“It was thanks to the warp gates that we managed to win the Demon World War."

The words of outsiders that everyone thought to be ridiculous…

All world-changing inventions started with them. The Grand Duke turned to look at me. He was looking down on me, as he was very tall.

I felt overwhelmed.

“Reinhardt, what do you think I’m trying to say?”

The ridiculous words of an outsider… Did he mean that we would end up making things that would change the world? Was he complimenting me?

However, if that were the case, the Grand Duke should have just invested in us.

He’d argued…

He’d even gotten into a huge fight with his beloved daughter.

The intent of his statement was more than clear.

“You mean to say that one needs to become an emperor to realize the ramblings of

an outsider."

“I'm not that stupid."

He nodded.

“If you took it as a compliment, I would have kicked you out."

What the Grand Duke said to me wasn't to be seen as a compliment, it was sheer sarcasm.

'Even the emperors were criticized heavily by the public for realizing their words, so what are you even going to do with a few students?'

That was why he thought that my plans would end in failure.

“It was possible for them because they were emperors. However, even though they were emperors who could rule and exert influence over all of mankind, those were great turning points of history. They stood before crossroads that could decide the rise or fall of the Imperial power."

“Of course, the things you plan on making aren't anywhere close to the mana train or the warp gates. However, an item that would enable one to use external magical power like one's inert magical power, and an item that could make one easily reach the level of a superhuman…”

“One would open a new chapter in the history of magic, and the other would be a turning point in the history of superhumans. In short, they would eventually bring change to how wars are fought."

“In my opinion, those two inventions would be comparable, if not even more impressive, than the mana train and the warp gates."

“You're not an emperor, and the students of your research group aren't part of the Magic Association or some secret magic society nor are they members of the Temple research laboratories."

“Do you really think it's possible to create those things with your conditions?"

The Grand Duke asked me as if he was trying to interrogate me.

There was only one answer I could give him.

“Yes.”

That was how I answered without the shadow of a doubt. The Grand Duke seemed a bit surprised by my nonchalant answer.

“Why do you think so?"

“Even if it isn't possible, I'll still make it happen."

In the end, the only answer I could give him was that vague one.

“If we don't have enough money, we can just make some, if our abilities are lacking, we'll just get it. After all, weren't the emperors like that as well?"

“If it doesn't work, I'll just make it work."

“'Anyway, just do it. I'll grant you unlimited support, so just do it until it works.' Something like that, right?"

The Grand Duke's expression became somewhat strange at my words.

"I don't know anything about magic. I really have no clue, but I'll make it possible for them to make those things. I'll do anything in my power to get them everything they need to do it. That's all."

The emperors knew nothing about magic.

—I was the same.

The emperors promised 'unlimited support'.

I did as well.

What made me different from the emperors? Faced with my conviction, the Grand Duke seemed to feel rather weird.

“Fine. Although it is impossible, let's say you manage to do that. The ones who would receive all that support are still just mere students."

Even if I were to promise them unlimited support like the emperors, the researchers weren't even close to being the best wizards in the world. The difference between the applicant and the researchers wasn't resolved.

“No, I don't think that's the case."

I dared to object to the Grand Duke's words.

“I'm fully convinced that Harriet de Saint-Owan will be the world's greatest wizard. No, the greatest wizard in human history."

The Grand Duke's face twisted slightly at my words. It seemed like he didn't expect I would say that.

“Would it be that surprising for a wizard like that to make something that could flip the world upside down in their childhood?"

Harriet would be the greatest wizard in human history.

In fact, the Grand Duke of Saint-Owan also believed that. Why would it be impossible for Harriet to make something that went against common sense? The mere existence of such geniuses was already absurd, after all.

It was only natural for such absurd existences to achieve the impossible.

“Geniuses have their own way of doing things, which is something that most ordinary, common people wouldn't understand. Isn't it weird to judge what is or isn't possible for a genius just because it's impossible from the perspective of such ordinary people?"

The Grand Duke might be offended by those words that declared both him and me to be bums. However, I could see his lips twitch slightly.

Alright.

If he, who's a fool for his daughter, didn't bite after I praised her so much, I'd believe he wasn't human.

'Really? My daughter will become incomparably stronger than me in the future?!'

'To the point that I'd seem ordinary?'

'Why, of course! That's how it should be! Yes!'

'My daughter's the best!'

'You seem to be a bit insightful, huh?'

He was probably screaming stuff like that on the inside at the moment.

"Don't you think it would be more strange if it didn't work out?"

"Hm, well…"

The Grand Duke pretended to cough a few times before continuing to speak, his fist before his mouth, perhaps trying to cover it.

"Yes, well, I guess I indeed lacked some faith."

"I fully understand your concerns. I know the path to her future will be brilliant, but you want her to take a safer route."

"Well… yes, that was my intention."

He worried so much about Harriet because he had faith in her; that was why it was unavoidable for the Grand Duke to hold some distrust even though he trusted her.

He wasn't cooperating with the Magic Research Society's plans because he feared she would vainly struggle with a task she had no way of solving.

He didn't have to invest in us, he could have just given us the money, but he hadn't.

Money wasn't the problem, he was just afraid that his daughter would break down while trying to cling to some impossible task.

So that was why the Grand Duke decided to meet up with me when I suddenly showed up at his doorstep.

Originally, he probably just wanted to tell me to get rid of the Magic Research Society's current research interests.

However, it seemed like he ended up impressed with my ridiculous trust in Harriet's ability instead.

In fact, he himself, who should know best just how absurd his daughter's talent was, didn't trust in her as much as me, an outsider.

The Grand Duke seemed to feel a strange sense of shame because of that.

“And, erm, this might be a bit off topic…”

“Hm. What?"

"Well… Did you, perchance, have a fight with Harriet?"

"!"

The Grand Duke's eyes widened at those words.

After she’d asked him to invest in us, Harriet seemed to have had a big fight with the Grand Duke, it looked like she held a long lasting grudge.

It was more than clear that he didn't only tell her that he wouldn't give us any money, but he’d also said that she shouldn't be part of the Magic Research Society either.

That fight didn't happen because he wasn't willing to give us any money. The fight must have broken out because the father told her not to do something while the daughter absolutely wanted to do it, so the Grand Duke probably ended up telling her not to waste her time on useless things.

Perhaps even then the cold war between Harriet and the Grand Duke was still ongoing, saying things like "Hmpf! I hate you, daddy! I hate you!"

He obviously felt restless.

“When I get back, I'll talk to her a little. I'll tell her that His Highness the Grand Duke said those things because he was worried that she might get hurt, not because she asked for an investment."

“Well… Hm. Ehem. Y-you don't have to do that."

The situation was quite tense, but I would put in a good word for him.

The Grand Duke's face lit up at those words.

The mother was quite tender…

So, looking at her dad, I could tell…

“Hm, well, You don't have… You don't have to worry about this. It's my job. Yes. This is quite common between a father and a daughter…”

Harriet's personality resembled her father's.

I could tell just by listening to him.

That uncle, the Grand Duke, who was also an archwizard… wasn’t him talking like that strangely cute?

“Ah, well. But well… if you could clear up the misunderstanding… Ehem, that would be good."

Anyway…

His daughter was awesome.

No…

That was a bit weird.

Anyway, things turned out fine.

That was just how far the Grand Duke's favoritism went.

MAX achievement reached.

CHAPTER 240

I was done with all of my business, so I just had to go back.

However, Grand Duke Saint-Owan seemed to want to walk around a bit more. Wasn't that gentleman sleepy?

I could get back to Temple, but I sure wouldn't be able to get a wink of sleep due to how late it was, so I actually didn't have the time to walk around more.

"Reinhardt, what do you think of Arnaria?"

Grand Duke Saint-Owan was nothing more than the father of a friend to me.

But why did it seem like he was my father-in-law? He had his hands clasped behind his back, got all serious, and talked as if he was trying to put me in my place because of my relationship with his daughter and not because of my status.

What was with that?

There was nothing between us, but I felt like I had reached the point where I couldn't fix it anymore.

Of course, putting that aside, the Grand Duke's question…

What do I think of Arnaria?

"I think it's amazing. I haven't seen any place like it, but… I still have much to learn, so I don't know how to express these feelings properly. My apologies."

"You know how to talk."

Was it too obvious that I was just saying those things without meaning them?

The Grand Duke looked over Arnaria's garden.

"It's a lonely place."

Even the Grand Duke, who had populated the entire palace with nothing but automated dolls, thought that the isolated scenery of Arnaria was lonely.

Most of the gardeners, guards, and staff were golems.

It seemed like some among the staff were human, but Arnaria could operate with only the bare minimum of people.

It was probably for the sake of safety, and it would certainly be much safer that way, but as a result, Arnaria had become a safe, beautiful, and lonely place.

I didn't know what kind of reaction I should have to the words the owner of the White Palace had said with his own mouth.

"Harriet spent a long time here."

"That's how it seems."

Someone who despised anyone who had a lower status than her and had less talent—Harriet had been such a person.

She was treated with the utmost respect and grew up beautifully in that place, surrounded by her family that would take care of her whenever she felt angry and made a fuss if there was even just a scratch on her.

"Do you understand why I sent Harriet to Temple?"

That was a question I had for a long time already.

Harriet could study magic in Arnaria. It was the Grand Duchy of Saint-Owan, and her father was an Archwizard, so why did she have to go to Temple to study magic?

Harriet de Saint-Owan, the young lady of the Saint-Owan Duchy, a territory far advanced in magic, had gone to Temple's Royal Class.

That was the setup I'd made for her.

However, Harriet didn't actually need to study magic at Temple.

In the end, the 'why' for that had also been supplemented.

Harriet had lived in that lonely palace for all of her life up until then.

She was arrogant, ignorant on how to treat others, and lived a life where everything would be solved if she whined long enough. She was someone who treated commoners and vassals which she occasionally encountered like bugs.

What would a father do who saw his daughter acting like that?.

“You wanted her to gather some experience and meet a lot of different people… Is that it?”

“Indeed.”

Temple was a place where one’s status became meaningless.

In Temple, one couldn’t pressure others with one’s identity.

Grand Duke Saint-Owan wanted Harriet, who had grown up sheltered, to gather some experience in a completely different environment. He wanted her to know that the world she knew and experienced wasn’t everything.

So he’d sent her to Temple.

She hadn’t changed until the end in the original, though.

However, things had become different due to my presence.

Grand Duke Saint-Owan would have wanted Harriet to run into someone similar to me, if not someone exactly like me.

“Harriet seemed to have made a lot of friends, and her personality changed a lot as well.”

“…”

“Although I can’t say that it’s all because of you, I also can’t say it’s not.”

The Grand Duke wanted Harriet to change, and she actually had. He seemed satisfied with that. Her narrow-mindedness had greatly diminished. In the end, even though he opposed the Magic Research Society, it meant that Harriet was smoothly making

friends.

He couldn’t bring himself to hate it entirely.

It felt kind of strange to hear those things from him.

The Grand Duke of Saint-Owan and his family…

They didn’t seem to be too stuck on their status. In fact, I was supposed to be a lowly street beggar, and, to put it harshly, I was someone that would even be looked down on by commoners. Actually, Harriet hadn’t called me beggar or anything like it for a while.

However, the Grand Duke’s family didn’t seem to hold any prejudice at all towards me, no matter where I came from.

‘He’s a commoner, but he’s still my daughter’s friend, so I should treat him well.’

It wasn't even at that level. He didn’t seem to care at all.

When I’d first met him, the Grand Duke had said that his daughter would never seek counsel from a lowly person such as myself, but he had actually been speaking from her point of view.

I didn’t say anything back then because I didn’t want to back down.

“What do you think about my background?”

So I just decided to ask because I was curious. The Grand Duke looked at me silently.

It looked like he had to think about that for a while.

“…Do you know the Saint-Owan family’s history?”

The Grand Duke answered me with a completely unexpected question.

“I don’t.”

“The ancestors of the Saint-Owan family were tanners.”

“…”

"Executioners, tanners, and butchers… These jobs are considered to be the lowest of the low. Back then, they couldn’t even have a house near a village.”

The lowest of the low would be those who were ignored and despised, even by the lowly.

"A tanner's house had urine bins in them to disinfect the leather, and the smell prevented them from owning houses inside a village. I’ve actually smelled it before; I can’t say it was enough to call it awful.”

“…”

“Just being a tanner was reason enough for a divorce. Even if they said before that they could endure it, if they asked for a divorce, you couldn’t do anything but accept it. The Saint-Owan family had its origins in such tanners.”

Grand Duke Saint-Owan told me stories of a past even I didn’t know happened. He could have just forgotten all about their origins in tannery, but the Grand Duke had remembered it.

“The Saint-Owan family, no, how do you think the descendants of such lowly people, who weren’t even considered commoners, managed to reach so far?”

The difference between a tanner’s cabin filled with the smell of rotting urine and the White Palace Arnaria was immeasurable.

However, the Saint-Owan family were the masters of the Duchy.

They’d left their lowly origins behind at some point. However, the owner of the White Palace had not forgotten his origins.

“…Was it through talent?”

“Right.”

That was the only thing necessary for the vulgar to become noble.

They’d managed to jump the gap.

"The Saint-Owan bloodline has carried a strong affinity for magic for generations, but for a tanner, magic was just a word, something too far to reach. However, from the moment we somehow awakened that talent, over generations, we eventually managed to reach this point."

"Social status…"

"It's useless."

"After all, the world only needs useful people."

"Those who were born noble may be nobles right now, but we don't know what the future may bring."

"Similarly, a person born lowly may be lowly now, but it's impossible to know what might happen in the future."

"With only ability, talent, or power…"

"Everything can be overcome."

Grand Duke Saint-Owan looked at me.

He was a cold, meritocratic man.

"Your lowly background doesn't matter anymore because you already managed to enter the Royal Class."

"…"

* * *

"Status? The moment you graduate, any kingdom, state, or even the Empire, should you decide to stay, would be scurrying over themselves to give you a title to tie you down; it wouldn't be an empty one, either. They might give you a title comparable to mine."

I was a commoner, but I had no reason to continue to live as one.

It was because of my talent. I was a supernatural power user, and if I grew up safely until my graduation, I would be stronger than any ordinary knight.

My ability… My strength…

I could already be considered a noble from those things alone.

Grand Duke Saint-Owan didn't even consider me to be a commoner when I was already guaranteed to have that kind of future waiting for me.

Of course, those were the values of the Grand Duke who knew that if one was backed by talent, their status would follow.

The members of the Grand Duke's family treated me normally because they knew that considering my background was meaningless.

Only because of my ability…

Was that why he acknowledged me?

The Grand Duke of Saint-Owan and his family were all meritocrats, so they didn't care about status.

If you were incompetent, they would despise you, if that wasn't the case, they would respect you.

I was being respected.

"So I don't care about your status. Don't worry."

However, what the Grand Duke said to me as he looked at me was a bit strange.

I was just asking him those things because I was curious, but I wasn't actually that worried about my status, you know? So why the hell did he think I was?

"You're more than qualified to marry Harriet."

"…?!"

No.

What was he talking about?

“That means that you don’t have to be concerned about your humble background to propose to Harriet.”

No.

No, wait!

“Wasn’t that why you suddenly came to this place at this hour to ask that?”

It seemed that all of the Grand Duke’s family had seriously misunderstood something.

The Grand Duke held an even worse misunderstanding than that.

He thought I was already dating and that I came all that way with the next step in mind—marriage.

No wonder…

He’d opened the gates as if he had been waiting for that moment…

It wasn’t like that! I’d just stopped by Arnaria, I didn’t go there because I liked Harriet to such an extent, but it was clear that he thought that I’d gone to Arnaria at night because I wanted to get his permission to marry her.

“However, don’t cross the line.”

Faced with the Grand Duke who had a ferocious expression on his face as if he would rip me apart if I were to touch his daughter before marriage, I couldn’t tell him that I only went to Saint-Owan to meet up with a female senior I knew.

If I said that, he would kill me.

It was all a misunderstanding.

The moment I understood that it was like that, I froze because I didn’t know what was going to happen.

I simply went there to get priority access to the warp gate…

However, I suddenly got permission to marry Harriet out of nowhere.

If I wanted to become a noble, I would have countless chances.

I had enough qualifications to marry Harriet, so I shouldn't worry about proposing to her.

However, I shouldn't cross the line or else I'd die.

When the Grand Duke of Saint Owan said those things, I couldn't tell him that I wasn't actually in a relationship with his daughter.

I felt like he'd ask me why I wasn't going out with her if I said that.

Harriet wasn't there at the moment to stop the Grand Duke from running wild.

So I exited the White Palace after being acknowledged as their daughter's lover by the whole family when there was actually nothing between us.

I felt like I was about to go crazy.

What the hell was with that?

If I didn't marry Harriet later on, they would definitely kill me.

I was sure that they would think that I'd just played around with their daughter and wouldn't believe me at all if I tried to explain why I didn't end up with Harriet.

I…

I had really done it.

Do I seriously have to marry the idiot now?

Of course, for that to happen, we would have to resolve that Gate Incident, so I thought it would be great if we could get to that point. Until then, things would be fine.

Anyway…

My nightly escapades, which were triggered by Adriana dropping out all of a sudden, came to an end.

I managed to take a day trip across the Saint-Owan Duchy while trying to figure out what to do.

In the end, I didn't manage to bring Adriana back, but…

I felt like I'd caused something even bigger…

What should I do…?

* * *

[Quest completed - Return]

[You've received 200 Achievement Points.]

I returned to the Imperial Capital at dawn.

I was certain that Ellen wouldn't have a reason to beat me up anymore.

She wouldn't beat me up while asking me things like, "Where were you last night?!" right?

No, when I thought about it, I had never actually been beaten up by Ellen other than when we trained, but she had never actually been serious then.

Why was I so worried about getting beaten up by her? I wasn't that kind of person.

Did I get tamed after getting hit so many times during practice…?

Adriana wasn't in Temple anymore…

That fact made me feel a little lonely somehow.

Anyway…

There were some who knew that I went out the previous night.

However, no one knew that I had been to the Saint-Owan Duchy. I was incredibly tired because I couldn't sleep, and I couldn't sleep when I got back either because of the time.

"Did you stay up all night?" Ellen asked me, seeing that my face was the perfect representation of fatigue.

"Ah… I had to do something."

It was time for breakfast.

Five people, including myself, always sat together to eat breakfast.

The four girls and I.

Harriet spoke up while frowning…

"Where have you been? Did you cause trouble again?"

Yeah.

I caused some trouble, alright.

However, that trouble didn't just involve myself, but Harriet, who looked like she was trying to figure out if there was something she could tease me with, but I didn't say anything.

Seeing Harriet acting like that… how could I tell her?

I felt like I had been too harsh to her. While she wasn't as much of a princess as

Charlotte, seeing the White Palace Arnaria, I'd realized that she definitely was comparable to one.

I'd bullied someone like that by spouting all kinds of bullshit.

Although the girl was trying to pick on me first, I seemed to have hurt her a lot just because I'd thought her reactions were funny.

Her personality had eventually changed, but when I thought of Harriet in a dress in that Palace, being treated so preciously, I felt guilt that didn't exist before creeping up within me.

"Well, I'm sorry."

"…Huh? Wh-what?"

Harriet openly showed her surprise when I suddenly apologized.

"You're a young lady, but I didn't treat you like one; that made you feel bad, right?"

"Wh-what's all this, all of a sudden… What are you talking about? Wh-why are you… What are you going to do this time?"

Harriet seemed to be under the idea that I was saying those things because I had another, darker intention.

'You bastard, what are you scheming, calling me young lady all of a sudden?' was what she seemed to want to say.

Not only her, but Liana and Adelia also seemed terrified of my sudden actions.

No, but I'd seriously reflected on myself the day before. The Grand Duke's words aside, I thought I had been too harsh to her so far.

The grandeur and splendor of Arnaria…

I'd treated that girl, who lived in a place like that, far too harshly.

I couldn't treat her like a young lady, but I should at least treat her well.

She wasn't an idiot, but a young lady…

I should have treated her with a bit more respect…

I shouldn't call her an idiot anymore.

"From now on, I won't call you an idiot anymore, but young lady."

"H-huuh?! Wh-wh-what…? Are you kidding me? Why are you doing this to me right now?!"

"Eat well, young lady."

Harriet's lips were twitching, and she was wearing a puzzled expression. No, why was she like that? I'd only told her that I would treat her well, right?

"You, I don't know what happened, but just get some sleep."

Liana snorted at me and suddenly said something like that. Her complexion turned slightly blue for some reason.

What was wrong with her?

"…Why?"

"Cause you're in a damn weird mood right now."

I guess she thought that I was talking nonsense because I was tired.

Well, I really was very tired.

CHAPTER 241

Reinhardt was acting weird.

She didn't know what he had been up to all night, but he kept on calling her 'young lady' after that.

"Young lady, you should go to the club room."

Hearing him say that didn't feel right at all. It caused a strange chill to run down her spine and an itch to develop all over her body.

That feeling became very difficult for her to bear.

"Why do you keep calling me 'young lady'?!"

"…Because you are a young lady."

That was true.

She was the young lady of the Saint-Owan Grand Duchy. In fact, she had lived while hearing others calling her 'young lady' rather than her own name, so Harriet had actually no aversion to being called 'young lady'.

However…

When the words "young lady" left Reinhardt's mouth…

Somehow…

It kind of…

Felt dirty.

"Don't do this! We're in Temple! You aren't allowed to mention my background!"

"No, it's only prohibited if you try to use your status to pressure others, the title itself

doesn't have anything to do with that, young lady."

“U-urgh!”

She felt like she was getting teased.

No, why did being called ‘young lady’ feel like an insult when it came out of his mouth?

Harriet felt like she was about to go crazy.

Young lady…

She had heard those words a lot in her life.

However, she didn't want to hear them coming out of his mouth.

“Wait, I'm not teasing you. I'm actually trying to be nice to you, so why are you freaking out? Aren't you a young lady?"

“I am! I know! Just don't call me that!"

She'd rather…

She'd rather…

"J-just call me ‘Idiot’ like before! This makes me feel uncomfortable!"

That would be better.

Harriet shouted, blushing out of embarrassment.

“Erm, idiot."

“Y-you… You! Th-that's the reason! That's why you did this!"

In order to make her say those words with her own mouth, he’d kept calling her ‘young lady’, which was uncharacteristic of him.

She’d fallen for it.

"Not really? But for you to want to be called ‘idiot’ over ‘young lady’…You're a real legend."

“Le-le… Legend?"

"Yeah, you idiot. As expected, that one is pretty fitting."

"Iiirk! Iiiirg!"

Idiot…

In the end, Harriet, who was in a bad mood, had no other choice but to accept it as her actual nickname.

She felt more comfortable being called ‘idiot’ than she felt being called ‘young lady’.

"U-urg… Uuh… Urg!"

“N-no… Are you crying? Why are you crying?"

Harriet felt really sad, so she cried.

She didn't like being called ‘idiot’.

However, she hated being called ‘young lady’ even more.

“Y-you… You really are a bastard…”

“Ah, sorry. Should I just call you ‘young lady’ then?"

“Arg! Don't! Stop!"

There were many people who called her ‘young lady’.

There were many people who called her ‘Your Grace’ and many who called her ‘Harriet’.

Idiot…

Reinhardt was the only one in the world who called her that.

Harriet herself found it rather weird that she placed such importance on that word.

She wasn't sure about others, but she found him calling her ‘idiot’ felt much better than him calling her ‘young lady’.

For that…

She hated herself a lot.

* * *

Reinhardt, who had been out all night, didn't receive a demerit because he managed to properly attend class. He didn't tell her what happened, but Harriet would soon find out.

'I heard you fought with your father.'

‘…Why are you bringing that up?'

'Why did you fight with your parents about something like that? They only did it because they care for their child.'

'Wh-what do you know?'

'Anyway, reconcile with them. I mean, parents aren't as one-dimensional as their children think. Do you know how much it upsets them when they have a fight with their children?'

‘…'

Reinhardt, who knew that she had a fight with her father, suddenly told her to make up with her parents.

Normally, she would have shouted something like, "Why are you interfering in this?" or "Who are you to put your nose in other people's family matters?"

However, Reinhardt didn't have parents. She couldn't just ask him things like “what do you know about such family matters?” or “who do you think you are?”

She thought that, no matter how she decided to say it, she would end up hurting him.

“…Okay.”

That was the only thing Harriet said.

She used the communication device within Temple to connect to the one within the White Palace Arnaria.

After some time passed, the communicators were soon connected with just a slight delay. That was when Harriet said that she had been too much and that she was sorry.

They had a long conversation.

She made up with her father before her mother took over the call.

-Oh my, my baby knows how to apologize first now. You're all grown up.

“…All grown up?”

While she wasn't so sure about her being completely grown up yet, everyone at home simply treated her like a little kid. Especially her mother—she still called her ‘baby’ even.

She hated it.

-By the way, he was here.

“He?”

-I don't know about anything else, but he sure is handsome. That's good. Your mom approves.

“…What are you talking about all of a sudden?"

And who is the 'he' she's talking about?

-Ah, that was supposed to be a secret. Oh my, I made a mistake…

“No, what do you mean?"

-Oh my, oh my, he said we should keep it a secret, so we should…

“What on earth are you talking about?!"

It was often the case that her mother ended up talking to herself like that, so no one but her could understand what she was trying to say.

-You know, Reinhardt.

“…Reinhardt? What about him?"

She often talked to her family about Reinhardt, but her mother's words seemed a bit strange. Why did she call him handsome? It was like she met him personally.

-He came to see us the other day. What's more, it was at dawn.

"Whaat? N-no. In Arnaca?"

-Do you know how surprised we all were when he suddenly came to us in person and asked us to open the gates?

No.

She’d been wondering where he’d gone, only returning to Temple early in the morning, and even keeping it secret from others.

-He was so cute. Just how desperate was he to rush to our yard at dawn like that?

“That guy… Why did he go to Arnaca?"

-Why? Maybe because he felt anxious about his origins. That was why he came to ask for our permission. He's already so sincere and serious. So different from other kids his age.

A very huge misunderstanding…

Was about to happen.

“Permission? Permission for what?"

-Of course, for you two to date, what else?

“Dating?"

-Hmm? Aren't you two dating already? It's about love, love. My baby obviously loves Reinhardt.

“…Huuh? ”

What on earth is she talking about?

Harriet's brain seemed to have stopped working.

She’d never told them, but it seemed like her whole family already knew her feelings.

-So it seems like Reinhardt came all the way to Arnaca to ask if it was okay to date you. Well, he has quite a way with words. The whole family approves of him.

“W-Wait… What on earth…? How…?"

Reinhardt went to Arnaca to ask for permission to marry her?

How did that happen?

He’d seemed to try to be nice to her by calling her ‘young lady’ and such ever since getting back. She didn't like it because it felt kind of gross.

That…

Did he act like that because he wanted to ask her out properly?

No…

It wasn't simply that.

According to her mother, Reinhardt seemed to think that they were already in a relationship.

He didn't go to them to ask if he could date her but seemed to ask if it was okay that they were dating.

It couldn't just be a misunderstanding.

What other reason would Reinhardt have to go to Arnaca?

He had absolutely no reason to go to that place that had no connection to him other than her.

-While it's a bit early, your father said that he's in favor of a marriage between you two. Why the rush, I wonder? Your father and Reinhardt talked about the matter separately, but it seems like he really planned that far ahead already.

What?

Did Reinhardt and dad already talk about what comes after dating—marriage?

-Anyway, you two are just students and are too young, so don't do anything reckless. Otherwise, mom will get angry. Understood?

“U-uhm… Uh. ”

Just what happened?

-By the way, how long has it been since you two started dating? It seems like you started talking differently about him ever since you came back from the deserted island.

Marriage between her and Reinhardt…

A secret meeting…

* * *

Harriet's brain ended up freezing, flooded with all that nonsense and the circumstances surrounding it.

She turned into a real idiot.

Why did Reinhardt go to Arnafia and suddenly talk about love matters and marriage?

That meant that Reinhardt already seemed to believe they were already together and in love.

It was already more than clear that he first talked about them dating and then marriage.

I…

I… was already dating Reinhardt?

Since when?

Why didn't I know until now?

Harriet felt like she was about to go crazy.

* * *

Lines of reasoning that start with preconceived conclusions tend to be erroneous.

The Grand Duchess started off with the assumption that no one in the world wouldn't like her pretty and loveable youngest child.

She couldn't help but think that Reinhardt came to them because of her young daughter, so she didn't even ask why he'd gone to Arnaca in the first place.

Why? She simply took it as a matter of course that he came because of Harriet.

That was why Harriet de Saint-Owan found herself in that great mess.

“Why do you keep staring at me? Do you have something to say?"

“…Nothing, idiot."

Harriet's heart started to race as she saw Reinhardt shooting her down in a slightly harsh manner like usual.

He'd said to her parents that he wanted to marry her…

However, it seemed like Reinhardt wanted to keep that meeting a secret, so her mother urged her to pretend not to know about the matter.

After worrying about the huge gap in status between them, he'd gone on a trip to Arnaca in the middle of the night.

Reinhardt seemed to believe that they had already been dating each other for some time.

Since when?

Since the deserted island? Since they visited the Edina Islands?

…Or even long before any of that?

When she thought of it, at some point, Reinhardt had started taking care of her in various ways even though he seemed ticked off outwardly.

Could that be the reason why? Was he acting like that in an attempt to do something nice for his lover?

No matter how much she thought about it…

Reinhardt always seemed to lose his composure if something involved her, but still, it was just too much.

Common sense made it hard for her to believe that he just took off to Arnaca in the middle of the night to ask her parents for her hand in marriage.

She felt like it was some sort of misunderstanding.

It had been a while since Harriet had left Arnaria.

She knew that her family was especially protective and a bit too proud of her.

So there had to be some sort of misunderstanding.

Obviously…

Harriet spent her day with those complicated thoughts haunting her mind.

* * *

During her Practical Magic lecture…

Harriet focused and completed all calculations necessary to manifest the spell and invoked it inside a fortified facility built as a precaution.

A blazing fireball was summoned about five meters above Harriet's head.

The fireball was five times larger than a normal one.

-Woooosh!

Its speed exceeded that of sound, and it rushed towards the pile of practice targets.

-Kaboooom!

It shook the ground with a fierce explosion that encompassed a radius of about 20 meters from its impact point.

Harriet had the earring Reinhardt had gifted her hanging from her ear.

“Casting time is about 30.2 seconds, power is A-rank or higher. Mana control stability is A-rank or higher."

The teaching assistant judging her magic invocation and its process nodded.

"Harriet de Saint-Owan, you have perfectly executed the Flame Strike spell. Excellent job."

“Thank you."

Harriet was the only one among her classmates that, despite its complexity, succeeded in demonstrating the large-scale destruction spell Flame Strike.

It was a high-ranking destruction spell for which one had to create a Fireball five times its normal size and fire it at a speed exceeding the speed of sound. Upon collision with the target, it would crush it, emitting a shockwave.

Fireballs could completely crush Orcs, but Flame Strike could actually decimate Ogres.

Flame Strike…

Its execution was a complete success.

The others didn't know, but Harriet could already challenge the higher-ranking destruction spell, Explosion.

She was already able to use the highest-ranking destruction spell that could cause an immediate explosion at a designated coordinate. It wasn't a projectile spell.

Flame Strike was a spell she had already mastered during the vacation.

However, all of her classmates were looking at her as if she was some kind of monster.

Magic spells were simply formulas.

After she memorized Flame Strike, she could easily activate it if she started controlling her magical power.

Harriet completely understood the spell in her mind, so unless she was lacking magical power or her mana control was off, it would activate.

Those formulas were created by numerous scholars and archmages. One didn't have to create new ones, one just had to follow those that already existed.

Therefore, most wizards were, above all else, copycats.

Copying was just too easy for Harriet, who might step into the realm of new magic creation quite soon.

Harriet couldn't understand the students who weren’t able to do something so obvious. They just had to do it as it was written down, so why couldn't they do it?

Harriet used to despise such people because of that.

She was a person that was used to standing above others.

—Both in status and ability.

That was how she had been until she had met that weird guy.

* * *

After her Practical Magic lecture was over, she headed to the Magic Research Society's building.

Harriet and the other students who had been assigned research topics tended to pursue them in the Magic Research Society. Reinhardt didn't stop by, as he was doing his job outside unless it was a regular meeting.

"Haah… I have no idea. There are too many reagents needed for this, and I don't even know what I should do to get rid of the side effects."

Christina, who was tasked with creating a special drug that would heighten one's mana sensitivity and smooth one's mana control, let out a heavy sigh as if she was facing many difficulties.

It was the same for Adelia, who had been told to develop an artifact that would enable one to use exterior magical power just like one's internal magical power.

“Is it possible to make something like that to begin with…?"

Everyone was pretty pessimistic. Harriet also didn't think things would work out. To top it off, she was even tasked to study something like Dimensional Magic and ways to travel to a different world.

The things the other two were told to develop would be insanely valuable if they were made.

Why the hell did she have to research Dimensional Magic?

Harriet didn't understand.

However, Reinhardt believed in her.

He thought she could do it. Regardless of what happened in Arnaca, she eventually developed some interest in it.

Rather than her classes that only touched magic that had already been created, she didn't know what to do or where to start when it came to her topic.

She grew more and more appreciative of her task, regardless of whether she was successful or not.

It wasn't just memorizing or studying something someone else had created but pioneering a field of magic that didn't exist. She realized that she was still lacking in many ways but could still try her hand at it.

Of course, even the genius Harriet hadn't found a solution yet.

They were in the middle of having some tea because everyone was completely exhausted from researching.

“Senior, are you in a bad mood?"

According to Christina, she was actually the youngest and yet the most senior there. No. A-1 of the second year, Redina, muttered with a forlorn look on her face.

“Y-yes… a friend of mine dropped out. Adriana…”

“Ah, that… isn't that the senior who was always training with Reinhardt?"

" Yes."

Adriana…

Harriet knew that she was the senior that usually worked out with Reinhardt at dawn. When they ran into her, she often saw her greet and talk with Reinhardt.

What does she mean by “she dropped out”?

“Reinhardt tried to persuade her to come back when he went to the Monastery located in the Saint-Owan Duchy, but I guess it didn't work out…”

The Saint-Owan Duchy…

It was only then that Harriet remembered what Reinhardt had said to her a while ago.

'Do you know the Artowan Monastery?'

'The Artowan Monastery? I don't?'

'I heard it's in the Saint-Owan Duchy though?'

'Do you think I know every nook and cranny of the Duchy? I don't know that place, you idiot.'

'If you don't know, then say that you don't. Why are you getting angry?'

'I didn't get angry.'

'You're mad, right? You always get angry when you see me, right? I'm hurt.'

'I'm not maaaad!'

Reinhardt had clearly been asking for the location of a monastery somewhere in the Saint-Owan Duchy.

That night, Reinhardt had disappeared somewhere until the early morning hours.

Harriet finally realized the truth about the incident.

His goal wasn't to go to Arnaca but to meet up with the senior named Adriana.

She didn't know why, but it seemed like he wanted to talk to that senior that dropped out.

The senior didn't come back with him, so it looked like the talk didn't go well.

Reportedly, Reinhardt had suddenly shown up at Arnaria's doors, requesting priority use of the gate. She wasn't sure about the other things, but that part seemed to be the truth.

Gate usage priority…

That was the reason he'd stopped in Arnaria. The queue to the warp gate was far too long to just return to Temple. It would have taken several days.

Therefore…

They got it wrong, it was a total misunderstanding.

Wasn't just her family making a huge fuss? She had an inkling, but it turned out to be true.

Talking about marriage and all that stuff… Reinhardt wouldn't have mentioned those things directly.

They just thought it was like that, which had caused a misunderstanding.

That was a relief.

She wasn't affected by that misunderstanding for too long because she managed to discern the truth from someone else's, not Reinhardt's, words.

Harriet just sat there blankly until the tea in her cup turned cold.

* * *

That night…

"Urgh, my body…"

Harriet ran into Reinhardt, who stumbled out of the training room in the middle of the night. He faced her as he yawned and stretched.

"Shouldn't you be sleeping?"

"I'm going to."

It was a misunderstanding.

Her family's delusions had spread to her, and she almost had the wrong idea.

“Oh… Erm… Have you talked to your parents?"

Reinhardt hesitated before he opened his mouth as if he had just thought of something.

“Yes."

“Well, your father…”

“I know what you want to say."

Harriet somehow became very calm as she interrupted Reinhardt, who was about to say something embarrassing.

“You don't have to tell me."

“Oh… Erm. O-okay."

Reinhardt tilted his head, slightly bewildered, and looked at her. All that talk about marriage was a simple misunderstanding.

Harriet knew that it was one hell of a ridiculous misunderstanding.

However, she didn't even want to hear Reinhardt confirming it with his own mouth.

She felt like she would only get hurt if she let him talk.

"I… I'll just go then."

"Yeah."

Harriet didn't want to listen to Reinhardt's explanation.

She glanced at his back as he returned.

A misunderstanding…

Rather than knowing the truth, she would have liked to just misunderstand for a bit longer.

Harriet took off the earring she had been wearing for all that time.

As soon as the tranquility magic didn't affect her anymore, she covered her face with her hands.

She wanted to cry.

CHAPTER 242

I did my morning training on my own.

I could have done it with Ellen, but I didn't really have to.

They say one only realizes the importance of someone when they are gone.

Ever since I built up some strength, we were always only working out together without exchanging many words, but when she was gone, the gap she left behind felt quite large.

I realized that Adriana had been a very important person to me.

I planned on taking Redina with me the next time I went to see her.

The members of the club, Grace, and some of the second-years also seemed quite agitated by her suddenly dropping out. I didn't really care what they would ended up doing.

If they were to go see Adriana, would she even be willing to see them?

Since it was already out of my hands, I decided to not think about it any longer.

I also thought about catching those guys that were spreading malicious rumors about her and making them pay, but I ended up not doing that.

Adriana wouldn't want me to do something like that, after all.

Not doing anything about it would be the last thing I could do for Adriana.

Also…

It seemed like the misunderstanding caused by my visit to the Saint-Owan Duchy somehow got resolved as well.

So, in the end, I returned to my routine of working out, training, and going to class.

I didn't know how the problem with the Orbis Class was progressing, but it seemed clear that the emergency school shutdown would be extended.

If they were trying to solve the problem at its roots, they would have to pull them out, which would mean that the Orbis Class would get dismantled and restructured.

A lot of students would end up getting expelled, and a lot of teachers would end up getting fired.

And…

“Are you ready, Reinhardt? You know you don't have to come. I can just do this by myself."

Olivia seemed a bit more restrained than usual, but I couldn't just let her go on her own. In the end, I was going there because of my own problems, but I also couldn't just go by myself.

Still, she kept insisting that she would go alone, and I kept insisting that I would accompany her, which ended in my eventual victory.

I was grateful.

Olivia seemed to worry a lot about Adriana suddenly dropping out, and yet she still cared about my affairs.

“Yeah, I have no idea what I should be prepared for, but I'm ready.”

“My, doesn't that sound reliable?"

Olivia Lanze.

Dressed-up Edition.

“Oh my, look at you. Am I so pretty that you can't even hold eye contact with me?"

"That's right. You're pretty."

“O-oh. I didn't expect you would say that…”

That young lady, who always flirted so aggressively with others, would get incredibly embarrassed if one acted in kind. However, the truth was that Olivia, who was wearing an off-shoulder dress, shone more than she usually did.

My shameless praise following her silly remark made her fan her red face.

While Olivia was all dressed up, I only wore my Royal Class uniform.

The Support Association…

It was an extremely great opportunity to get some donations to bolster the Magic Research Society's budget.

That was why I was going to the party.

Olivia held her hand out.





"Will you escort me?"

“Just this once."

I took Olivia's hand.

“Th-this ain't how escorting works!"

-Drag, drag

Of course, Olivia totally freaked out because I just dragged her by her hand and didn't really escort her.

* * *

Originally, only fourth-years and above were allowed to attend the Support Association meeting. It was in the form of a party in which they would talk subtly about sponsorships after chatting about vapid things with the attendees going “hahahoho”.

Since the Support Association meeting was an official event held at Temple, it was held in the banquet hall located in the main building of Temple.

Usually, people couldn't enter without a Temple-issued pass, but in our case, those who intended to attend the Support Association meeting were allowed to enter without it in a limited manner.

I was thinking of taking the other members of the Magic Research Society, especially Harriet, with me. Since she was the young lady of the Saint-Owan Grand Duchy and was also insanely talented, it would be incredibly easy for her to win a sponsorship for the club.

However, after thinking about it for a bit, I ended up going to the Support Association meeting on my own.

It would have been something I would have to explain to the other club members, and I didn't want Harriet to be put in that position.

It wasn't a bad position or anything, but the task still involved whining and begging for money, after all. I didn't want Harriet to experience something like that.

It seemed like the other attendees were either going to the support meeting separately or in groups. I was on my way to the venue with Ceres and Olivia.

“Originally, this was a support meeting for all special classes, so normally there would also be some students of the Orbis Class present, but because of the current situation…”

“There will only be Royal Class students?"

“Yes, that's right."

Normally, the sponsors would compare the two classes, deciding who to sponsor as if investing in the more likely class to succeed. However, because of the problem with the Orbis Class, they were exempted from the event.

While I didn't know how Temple would solve those problems, the remaining people of interest might not appear again for a whole semester.

Ceres van Owen was also dressed up. Her appearance was quite impressive as well, but Olivia Lanze simply stood out too much.

“D-don't just stare at me like that…”

When I kept looking at her, she avoided my gaze as if she’d suddenly turned shy, different from her usual, clingy self. Olivia fumbled with her fingers and couldn't even look at me.

That girl…

'What's with that reaction? What a bold move!'

That was what Ceres seemed to think when she looked at Olivia at the moment.

Originally, she should have been a senior whom she respected quite a lot.

However, after that incident happened, Ceres seemed to look at Olivia with pitying eyes from time to time.

Well…

I knew how she felt. I also got dumbfounded from time to time when I saw her. Of course, she was so nice that she would even help rally donations for a club of some lower-year students that had nothing to do with her.

No matter how she acted outwardly, Olivia Lanze was someone I was insanely grateful to.

In fact, Olivia didn't even need sponsorship, so she wouldn't have come to the support meeting normally, but she was attending that day, which was unusual.

And, of course, Ceres wouldn't have to attend just for a sponsorship, but she was a student council president, so she had to.

She glanced at the list she was holding.

“There are many different types of sponsors: noblemen, rich merchants, knights, the Magic Tower, and the Magic Association."

“Okay."

“Among them, if there was one organization that would sponsor your Magic Research Society, it would be the Magic Tower or the Magic Association, right?"

“I guess so."

* * *

“However, they don't necessarily have to be connected to magic. There are cases where wizards actually join the knights as well, right?"

Olivia had a different opinion from Ceres, which was also reasonable enough. There was no way that only organizations related to magic would be interested in the Magic Research Society, after all.

“For now, I'll just pick out the most influential people among the support meeting attendees."

"Leader of the Knights Templar, Illion Milton."

“The Magic Association's vice president, Saintrident."

“Commander of the Imperial 1st Division, Shanapell, Saviolin Turner."

“Merchant Guild Master, Owen de Getmorea."

“There are many others, but these four should be the most important."

The former leader of the Knights Templar, Reverier Lanze, was dismissed, so his successor attended the meeting instead. I didn't really know who Illion Milton was. Olivia clearly seemed reluctant after hearing his name.

While Reverier Lanze, her stepfather, had been the more direct problem, Olivia seemed to dislike anyone in the position of being the Knights Templars’ leader. Even though he was just the successor, she would absolutely hate attending the support meeting with someone like that.

“I can go alone."

I suggested that because I didn't want Olivia to force herself to go to a place she didn't want to go to. However, she simply shook her head.

“What are you saying? I'm fine. It's not like I didn't know that they'd attend."

It seemed like she had been prepared for it, perhaps predicting that a huge organization like the Knights Templar would be in a position to attend those events.

Olivia Lanze was kind, almost seeming like a real pushover.

The Commander of the Knights Templar, Vice-President of the Magic Association, Commander of the Imperial Knights' first Division. and the Master of the Merchant Guild…

It was clear that, if we were to convince even one of those four, we would receive huge amounts of support.

However, I seriously hated the Knights Templar to begin with, and the Merchant Guild seemed quite twisted in my eyes as well.

I wasn't sure about the Magic Association, but they might’ve been willing to sponsor us, as our activities were magic related.

The first Division of the Imperial Knights had nothing to do with magic, so would they even be willing to sponsor us?

While I didn't know everyone or everything, I did know one of those names…

Imperial Knights First Division, Knights of Shanapell. Saviolin Turner.

A Swordmaster, of course.

No, they were even more than that.

* * *

The Temple students were sent to battle when the Gate Incident took place, however, there were also combat troops that didn't consist of students of course. Their greatest representative would be the Knight Order, specifically, Shanapell, the greatest Knight Order Division found on the continent. They made great contributions to the battle as well.

As most students didn't know how to fight properly, some knights took them under their wings and taught them how to fight in real situations.

Saviolin Turner gave Ludwig several lessons in that process.

At that time, Ludwig was in the possession of Alsbringer and was deemed a very important figure.

Ludwig and Ellen Artorius…

Those two were transferred to the unit under Saviolin Turner's direct command.

It was only natural that the best knight of the continent instructed the owner of the Holy Swords Alsbringer and Lament, who weren't yet familiar with those kinds of battles.

She had a cold and unfeeling personality and treated Ludwig very harshly, whipping him while constantly comparing him to Ellen, who was good at everything.

Since the world was at stake, Saviolin Turner had no other choice but to resent Ludwig more than he actually deserved.

It was easier to die than survive, and with a weak body and mindset, only an even worse ending than death would await you.

While Saviolin Turner had nothing to teach Ellen, who excelled in everything, she had a lot to teach Ludwig.

In battle, Saviolin Turner taught him countless things, and, near the last chapter, she actually lost her life protecting Ludwig.

In the end, Ludwig became a Swordmaster in that process.

She was a very important character after the gates appeared.

I never thought I would meet her in a place like that.

“Now, shall we go in?"

And I really didn't expect that I would end up meeting her with Olivia Lanze, not Ellen and Ludwig.

We arrived at the banquet hall located in the main building.

* * *

“There are quite a few people."

“Right?"

The students present of Royal Class' fourth year and higher were about 60 in total. However, not all attendees were students.

Other than those that looked like students at first glance, there seemed to be more than 100 people.

“If all of the people that wanted to come actually came, there would be more than 1000 attendees."

Ceres added that the number of attendees was already greatly reduced.

The best students of Temple, an educational institution the Empire was proud of,

were the ones that were the Empire's future. There were many who wanted to invest in or build connections with them. There might've even been some who wanted to scout them before they graduated. Whether they were prospective, promising knights or those with business-related talents.

Every talent had a use in some place.

Some of the students greeted sponsors they already knew for quite some time as well as some they seemed unfamiliar with.

And as we entered, all their eyes turned to us.

To Olivia Lanze, to be exact.

Someone who had renounced her faith but was still famous as the Saint of the Eredian District.

Although she had been a promising prospective paladin, the fact that she had given up on everything and still went to that place where the commander of the Knights Templar was present quickly cooled the atmosphere.

To be honest, it might've just been that they found it hard to take their eyes away from Olivia, dressed as she was.

Olivia wore a smile on her lips as if she was already used to these gazes.

What the heck? She isn't bothered by this at all.

She sure was a strange person.

"Is there anything official we need to do?"

"Hm, not really. You can just go and relax."

It sure was a relief that there wasn't anything like a time to promote oneself where I had to go up on the podium and tell those people to give me money.

I was really worried that I'd have to do something like that.

However, if there wasn't anything like that, how was I supposed to open a

conversation with the sponsors? Did I have to go up to those people I had never seen before and randomly pitch them my business plan, asking them to just lend me some money?

Wouldn't they just think I was a scammer?

However, contrary to my worries, there was someone who approached us first.

“I can't believe you actually came here. This is a big deal."

"I didn't come to a place I shouldn't be at, now did I?"

“You didn't."

I didn't recognize his face, but I could guess his identity, judging by the robes he was wearing.

The commander of the Knights Templar, Illion Milton.

Olivia grabbed a glass of champagne from the tray of a passing waiter, took a small sip, and smiled.

Alcohol?

Right.

Olivia was an adult.

“Can't you change your mind?"

“Of course not."

The commander of the Knights Templar still seemed to feel that Olivia's sudden departure was a shame. He left after a short greeting, saying that he knew that Olivia's will was too firm to be swayed by him.

Olivia Lanze was simply too talented for people to leave alone. Reverier Lanze once said that she was talented in every possible way.

She was a talent hand-picked and selected to be in charge of the Knights Templar in the future.

However, Olivia couldn’t go back to them.

Ceres looked at her with pity. She was someone who lived by her faith in the Five Great Gods, although she didn't have the talents to become a paladin.

She seemed to think that it was very unfortunate that Olivia had abandoned her faith.

“There are some things that only get firmer with the passage of time."

“…Yes."

Olivia smiled at Ceres.

It wasn't just that she felt disappointment towards the Knights Templar.

Olivia had learned the reality of faith and the gods after the Tiamata incident: the demon gods didn't exist and were actually the same beings as the great gods.

The truth that the power one received from a god was simply determined by the direction of one's faith.

Knowing that the gods actually had no sentience, Olivia could never have faith in them again.

At first, she decided to give up on her faith because she saw what their believers did, however shortly after she even found out that the gods had such flaws.

Olivia definitely would never place her faith or loyalty in the gods again. Therefore, she didn't even consider joining the Knights Templar.

Most of my unknown seniors of the Royal Class were talking to the sponsors about one thing or another.

Ceres was a student council president, so she went around to see if she could do something, so Olivia was the only one left with me.

"Most of the seniors here must be majoring in magic and need some extra money, right?"

Olivia nodded at my words.

“There are also some students who came here to decide on their career path after graduation."

"Hmm… Are they trying to see who gives them the better offer or something?"

"That's right. There are even some cases where commoners are promised titles."

It was as the Grand Duke had told me.

In order to secure the promising talents of the Royal Class, some places offered them titles. That being said, while there were four major groups present, there would also be some representatives of the Empire among the attendees.

The meeting was basically an opportunity for others to build connections under the pretext of granting sponsorships to students, and at the same time, it was also like a job fair for those that didn't intend to attend graduate school because their graduation was imminent.

I wasn't sure just how much a Royal Class graduate was worth, but it had to be an enormous amount.

I wondered what my price would be.

While I didn't really think so, Mr. Epinhaused once told me that I was the most talented student in Temple.

“…Ah. ”

As soon as I thought about that, a cold-looking man talking with someone entered my view.

It was Mr. Epinhauser.

Of course, it was very much possible for teachers of the Royal Class to attend the meeting, but I still couldn't believe that I’d met my teacher at a party.

Of course, it was very much like Mr. Epinhauser to just wear his normal formal suit and not some fancy outfit.

I couldn't hear what he was talking about with the other people, but seeing that they wore quite grim expressions, it didn't just seem to be a friendly chat. I couldn't even imagine him talking to someone in a friendly manner.

“Now, shall we go fishing for some money?"

Olivia flashed a bright smile as she said that.

“…Should you really be talking like that?"

If she talked like that, wasn’t she basically blurting out that we were just there for money?

…Although that wasn't far from the truth.

“Don't be too disappointed, Reinhardt."

Olivia seemed to have a pessimistic outlook on this meeting from the get-go.

No, weren't we supposed to be able to make good money here?

CHAPTER 243

It was clear that the whole operation wouldn't have been very effective if I had gone on my own.

Everyone present knew Olivia Lanze.

“Ah, this is Reinhardt, a first-year. He's a supernatural power user. He has a bright future ahead of him."

"A supernatural power user?"

“These days, this junior of mine has some visions, so he created a place called the Magic Research Society."

“Hooh, what are you researching?"

.

"Miss Olivia, it is an honor to meet you."

“Haha, hello. This is Reinhardt, a first-year…”

.

People wanted to exchange some words with Olivia Lanze, who had become famous for a different reason than before, and she introduced me to those people without fail as if she was trying to sell me. She also put great emphasis on the new Magic Research Society that I had created and that it was in need of a significantly greater research budget.

While the attendees of the four major organizations were prominent, others were also quite formidable.

All of them were high-ranking nobles dispatched from each region as well as imperial nobles and other prominent people from various organizations.

Olivia talked to all of them and introduced me to them.

However, as she predicted, the results weren't that good.

“Oh, that seems to be quite significant research. I'll be rooting for you, Reinhardt."

“Then, if you would like to sponsor…”

“Ah, that. Rather than that, Miss Olivia. What are your plans after your graduation?"

He was more interested in the benefits that he could gain from the conversation than actually meaning what he said. He wanted to recruit Olivia rather than sponsor the Magic Research Society she’d brought up.

Olivia Lanze, who had been scheduled to join the Knights Templar, was like a pie in the sky for those people. However, since she decided not to join them, she was like a super hot commodity on the free agent market.

The mere appearance of Olivia Lanze, who often did volunteer work but rarely went to those kinds of events, seemed to change the atmosphere.

I could see that they were incredibly frantic to somehow attract Olivia to their side and any thoughts of the Magic Research Society were put on the back burner.

However, when they realized that she didn't go there to find a new career path, but rather, to seek a sponsorship for a club one of her juniors created, they stopped caring about us as if we were invisible.

So yeah, everyone had the same reaction.

In the end, they just came over and coveted a super-hot commodity, but the commodity intended to get them to sponsor a little kid who wanted to make some foolish inventions.

The man named Saintrident, the vice president of the Magic Association, seemed clearly uncomfortable.

“Uhm… It… it's good to have big dreams, Good luck, Reinhardt."

I felt a bit sorry for him. When others called me ‘genius’ or something, they were just

empty words.

In the end, we became the odd ones out in that place.

“As expected, it's not working."

Olivia scratched her cheek, seeming somewhat embarrassed.

“It's not like students of lower years aren't allowed to come, but there is no reason for them to come."

“Yes, that's true…”

I realized something in that place.

That was a place for scouting and sponsoring talents that were close to graduation.

Of course, the shorter the sponsorship period, the better. It was cheaper in terms of costs to just sponsor students close to graduation than sponsoring a first-year until the day they graduated since Royal Class' curriculum went for six years.

So a perfect target for sponsors were fifth or sixth-years. Sponsoring the lower years was inefficient because the sponsorship period was simply too long, even if they were in such high positions.

Their purpose was to create connections in the name of sponsorship and scout the student right after their graduation or something like that.

Therefore, the lower the year, the more disinterested the sponsors were.

In addition to being a first-year, I was also trying to make some very absurd things.

My graduation was still far away, and my path was unclear.

There was no way any of those people would sponsor me.

In the end, it was a similar concept to investing, so it was very difficult for me to obtain sponsorship.

Still, I didn't think I would be treated so poorly. Fortunately, I was still able to talk to Olivia.

"Still, we should try as much as we can."

Even if people's interest in us was fading, I decided not to give up.

Who knows? I might be able to catch one.

There was only one person who wasn't interested in us from start to finish.

Olivia and I went over to the Merchant Guild's master, Owen de Getmora.

Since he was the Merchant Guild's master, I imagined him to be a middle-aged man with a pot belly, but he was actually a man who seemed to have aged like fine wine.

He seemed to radiate elegance as well.

He was quietly drinking some champagne on his own in a corner of the banquet hall, observing the room's atmosphere.

He wasn't talking to anyone.

He didn't look like a merchant at all.

“Hmm, it seems you're dreaming of developing some great inventions."

It was clear as day that he thought that my research projects weren't much to talk about.

“By the way, I didn't expect to see you in a place like this, Reinhardt."

He seemed more interested in me than in the Magic Research Society.

To some extent, I could guess why he was. The business I’d started by opening stores at each train station… the Merchant Guild was an important investor. Since said business was in action, he had no choice but to know about me and the Rotary Gang.

A completely different connection from the Magic Research Society already existed between me and the Merchant Guild’s master.

Olivia didn't know the details, so she was just tilting her head, wondering why the Merchant Guild's master was showing interest in me. However, she didn't add anything that would make the atmosphere weird.

Those eyes that seemed to either belong to an old or middle-aged man stared at me.

He had no interest in Olivia whatsoever because he didn't run an organization that needed strength.

"Reinhardt, can I ask you a question?"

"Yes."

So he only looked at me.

He showed overt interest in me.

He was the only one in that place that seemed interested in me, whose conditions made others ignore me.

"Why do you think I'm here?"

"…You want me to guess your intentions?"

* * *

"Yes."

He stared at me.

A sudden question…

What would I gain by getting it right?

The first person that actually looked at me threw a test at me.

The guild master of the Merchant Guild, Owen de Getmora, was different in quality from the Thieves' Guild's master. While the Merchant Guild had their hands in one or two illegal businesses, it was still an organization of the surface world.

He was the leader of a group that was fundamentally different from the Thieves' Guild, whose mere existence was subject to eradication. There was only one reason he could occupy a spot in that place filled with VIPs…

His organization had more money than anyone else there.

“To give you a hint, I have no intention of scouting anyone, nor do I plan on sponsoring anyone."

He seemed to test my insight. Even if I passed that test, that didn't mean he would reconsider his choices.

Was he simply curious about what kind of person his business partner was?

However, in that place where I simply got ignored for my age, that person seemed like someone I could talk to, at least.

He had no interest in scouting or sponsoring anyone.

From the points of view of those running the sponsoring meeting, it wouldn't be strange if they kicked him out.

So why did he go to that place to begin with?

There would be no reason for him to ask that question if he just went for the heck of it. Of course, the answer had to be something possible to infer.

Let's think about what he might want to achieve.

The objective of the Merchant Guild's master was to eventually make money…

That meant that attending the sponsorship event was a type of scheme to make money.

When I thought about it a bit more, it wasn't actually that hard of a question.

All of the Empire's influential and important people were in one place.

“There should be no better place to accurately grasp the current situation of the continent."

“Could you elaborate?"

“One can grasp their needs by their actions and also confirm what they lack."

VIPs from every prominent group of the Empire were there…

And all of them moved to recruit talent. So if one observed their needs, one could also find out their weaknesses.

Since the knights wanted to supplement their armed forces, they looked for people with strong talents.

The money they invested reflected their organization's needs as well as what they lacked.

Even if one just listened to the conversations here and there, one could understand what each of them wanted.

Therefore, it was possible to estimate the organization's strength, needs, and financial status to some extent.

Owen de Getmora was a merchant.

He was someone who prepared things to satisfy people's needs and desires.

He smiled at my short answer.

“Magnificent."

"I just roughly guessed it's like that. I don't know what the Merchant Guild’s master will actually do with the information you gain from this place."

Owen said that my answer was great, but Olivia just looked at me with her mouth wide open.

No…

Why was she so amazed by that?

“Then now we can talk about the next point."

“By ‘next point’, you mean…”

“I had no intention of sponsoring anyone, but I didn't expect you to be here, Reinhardt."

He looked at me.

“I'm currently in a position where I have to sponsor you, Reinhardt. I have to do it now, not when you are in your fifth year. Can you tell me the reason for that?"

He needed to sponsor me, not wanted to. The sponsors there preferred to sponsor older students.

However, the Merchant Guild’s master believed it would be more advantageous to sponsor me while I was in lower grades.

That wasn't a difficult question either.

“My value doesn't lie in the me after I graduate. I think you see it in me as I am now, a Temple student."

“Even better."

Owen smiled, satisfied, and took a sip of his champagne.

Owen de Getmora couldn't help but know that the mana train station store business was being carried out with the support of the Imperial Family.

He didn't want to step in between the close relationship I had with them.

He didn't want Reinhardt, he wanted the classmate of the Imperial Prince and Princess.

In that case, my value wasn't in the me after I graduated but in the me while I was still a Temple student, so he wanted to build a connection to the Imperial Family by sponsoring me.

He didn't know the exact details, but I was even able to get exclusive business rights from the Imperial Family.

"How much do you need, Reinhardt?"

A proposal.

He asked for the price tag attached to my name.

Too much would make me seem shameless, and too little would make me seem stupid.

I was making a deal with an old, cunning man I had never seen before in my life. I didn't even know if I could do that.

I still had to do it, though.

While neither of us mentioned it, we were ultimately dealing with a connection to the Imperial Family. The moment we put it into words, we would commit Lèse-majesté.

We were trading intangible values.

"Well, I don't believe this is up to me to decide."

He asked for my price tag, but I changed the product we were trading indirectly.

It was a deal involving the Imperial Family, so I couldn't just set a price.

So I tried to check just how much a connection with the Imperial Family was worth to him.

Owen de Getmora looked at me and burst into laughter.

“My, what a great retort."

Olivia didn't even seem to know what was going on between me and the guild master anymore.

“I'll send you the right amount at the right time according to the proper procedure."

He was a merchant.

In the end, he never told me how much he would give me.

However, if the amount was disastrously low, the Merchant Guild would be heavily criticized.

He promised to pay appropriately for the intangible product.

I received something without having to give anything.

However, that was also quite scary.

There might've been a situation in the future where I had to give him something, but at that point, I didn't even know what I would have to give.

I could tell him that I didn't know I would have to give whatever it was he asked for when the time came, but he was a merchant…

And merchants always sought their due pay.

CHAPTER 244

“Reinhardt, what the hell happened?"

Olivia didn't seem to understand the situation in which I suddenly received a sponsorship from the Merchant Guild's master after talking about this and that.

“He seemed to know you, and you also looked like you knew something… I don't even know what's what anymore."

Olivia's pupils were shaking so much that it was like they were affected by an earthquake. Owen and I hadn’t let anything definitive slip.

We’d suddenly had a question and answer session and made a deal while indirectly referring to things only we knew about.

What was the value that I only had while attending Temple and why did Owen want to buy me?

"It's basically as you saw. What else do you want me to tell you?"

“I'm sad!"

When I cut the conversation short, Olivia pretended to cry. In the end, I wandered around the sponsor meeting for quite some time, but the reason I got sponsored wasn't because of the Magic Research Society but because of the Rotary gang's ongoing business.

I didn't expect the guild master to show such interest in me, so I actually got caught.

However, there was a problem…

He eventually promised me a sponsorship, but I had no idea what I would have to give him in return. No matter how much money we received, it would never be enough, so the more, the better, but the Merchant Guild’s master was a bit special. There seemed to be no one else willing to sponsor me.

“You need more, don't you?"

Olivia seemed to have read my thoughts from my expression.

“Well, you never know how much I'll actually be able to get, the more the better."

“Hmm… Okay. I knew it would be like that, after all…”

Olivia seemed to have something in mind as well.

Knowing that it would be difficult for me to get a sponsorship, she brought me to that sponsorship meeting, so it looked like she’d made some plans as well.

The incident with the Merchant Guild’s master was an exception, so what did Olivia plan?

Owen sat alone again, and we decided to eat as well, sitting at a secluded table. There were many eyes that conveyed the desire toward Olivia, but no one dared to approach her because they knew that she was like an iron wall.

While Olivia was deeply immersed in her thoughts, someone approached the two of us.

“Number 11…”

“Ah, Teacher."

Mr. Epinhauser walked towards our secluded table, approaching me.

Olivia and I got up from our seats because we both knew who was standing next to him.

“We greet the leader of the First Imperial Knights Division, Shanapell. Dame Saviolin Turner."

There was a knight with a sword-like posture wearing the robes of the Imperial Knights standing next to him.

Looking at her calm but sharp expression, I froze up at her gaze.





However, she certainly looked young. I was pretty sure that she was a lot older than Mr. Epinhauser, though.

Of course, I made a setting that those who reached the level of a superhuman or higher would age slower or even become younger.

If one were to use terms from martial arts novels, the phenomenon would be called ‘rejuvenation’. Saviolin Turner had reached that level.

That was why someone who was about to turn 60 looked like someone in their first year in Temple.

That felt incredibly weird.

“I'm Reinhardt, A-11 of the Temple Royal Class's first year."

“I'm Olivia Lanze, A-0 of Temple Royal Class's fifth year."

Olivia was number 0?

I was weirdly surprised.

When I thought about it, she was supposed to be in her sixth year, but she ended up staying in the fifth year because of her situation, so there would have been a need to give her a new number.

Usually, she would have gotten the lowest rank, but considering her talent, they couldn't do that, so that was probably why they’d given her the previously nonexistent number 0, which was even above Number A-1 of the fifth year.

Regardless of that, Saviolin Turner simply looked at me calmly.

"You're the Empire's future?"

“…What?”

No…

What did Mr. Epinhauser tell her?!

Contrary to what was said, his expression didn't seem to change in the slightest.

Mr. Epinhauser had actually told her with a straight face that I was the future of the Empire.

I thought I was about to go crazy for various reasons.

* * *

The leader of the Knights of Shanapell. The Empire's greatest knight…

Saviolin Turner.

She held out her hand to me and shook mine. It was a strong, rough hand.

The strongest knight of the Empire and the protector of the Imperial Family, Saviolin Turner.

All other talented people seemed insignificant before Ellen Artorius, but the woman before me was also a real monster.

She was also the continent's strongest in melee combat.

Saviolin Turner had been Mr. Epinhauser's senior when they'd attended Temple.

"I don't doubt your eyes, but I'm not really sure."

"He is still a first-year."

That damn nickname, "The Empire's future".

Only Mr. Epinhauser thought of me like that. It seemed like Saviolin Turner made a full estimate of me as she shook my hand.

But still…

Even if she was the continent's strongest, wasn't she ignoring me too much even though I was right in front of her?

That was it. She was the strongest.

Anyway, it still felt kind of weird that Saviolin Turner, wearing a somewhat mischievous face, spoke casually to Mr. Epinhauser, who seemed older than her.

In reality, she was a far-off senior to him. Sometimes, what one could see wasn't everything.

“I think, if you want to call someone the Empire's future, it would be this one."

Saviolin Turner looked towards Olivia Lanze.

"…”

Olivia greeted her, but she looked at her with slight wariness.

It seemed like they’d come across each other before.

Olivia becoming the future of the Empire? I wasn't sure.

She might or she might not have.

In the original, Olivia Lanze just quietly disappeared outside of the main story, but was she actually stronger than Ellen and Ludwig in the second half of the novel?

As she looked at Olivia with a stiff expression, Saviolin Turner started to speak.

“My offer is still valid. Olivia."

"…”

"If you don't want to join the Knights Templar, you can join Shanapell."

The future of the Empire…

Saviolin Turner put a lot more weight on Olivia Lanze. She couldn't help but do so. She had a lot more going on for herself than me, after all.

Olivia seemed to have gotten an offer to join the first Division of the Imperial Knights already.

Apparently, she'd refused it. Olivia looked at Saviolin Turner silently.

She somehow looked determined.

"How much can you give me?"

"…Money?"

"Yes."

Saviolin furrowed her eyebrows slightly when she heard those words.

…Then she looked at me.

"Oh. That's how it is."

That was the first time we officially greeted her, but she seemed to know that Olivia and I were going around trying to get donations.

It felt like my brain stopped working.

"If you promise to join us, I'm willing to give you up to 10,000 platinum coins."

Ten thousand platinum coins…

A million gold coins.

If we converted it to won, it would be one trillion.

Superhumans were like tactical weapons.

She was already treated as that kind of asymmetric weapon.

Did that mean that Olivia had already reached that level, or did she think she would reach it in the near future?

"That's how much we can invest in the Empire's future."

Looking at the price they were willing to pay for Olivia, she was being treated as more important than a fighter jet in modern times.

Only then did I realize that I had no idea how valuable Olivia actually was.

If one just saw the one trillion won, one would think of it as an incredibly large amount, but if one looked at it with the knowledge that it was the money used to buy the continent's next strongest fighter, someone that was on the same level as a high-quality tactical weapon that couldn't be stopped, wasn't it actually rather cheap?

If such a superhuman decided to work for some organization inside of the Empire and not directly under the Empire, that alone was a problem. From the Empire's point of view, it was something they had to prevent, no matter what.

I realized why Olivia Lanze acted as if everything was going to be solved as long as we attended the sponsorship meeting, even though she knew that it would be difficult for me to get a sponsorship.

She already knew who would buy her for the most.

“Yes, that should be enou—"

“Wait. Wait a sec."

However, I grabbed Olivia Lanze's wrist.

“What do you think you're doing now?"

Olivia lowered her eyes as if she already knew that I would act like that.

" I knew you would act like this… that's why I didn't want you to come along."

I’d realized that she was strangely reluctant to take me with her, so that was the reason.

* * *

I dragged Olivia out of the room the sponsorship meeting was held in without looking back a single time. I didn't care what Mr. Epinhauser or the best knight of the Empire thought.

“Did you tell me that you wanted to go alone because of this?"

"…"

Olivia couldn't even look me in the eyes, keeping her head down. She spoke without looking at me.

“Why do you… I… There's nothing I really want to do after my graduation, anyway, and they'll give me a lot of money. I don't even know what to do with all that money, and you, coincidentally, are in need of money, Reinhardt. That's just how it is."

“You don’t actually want to join them, do you?"

"…"

Olivia would have received many offers here and there, but she would have refused all of them. However, when she heard that I needed money, she suddenly tried to sell herself to the Knights of Shanapell.

…And wanted to funnel the money to me.

“Why do you do this? Because I saved your life once? If that's what that is, you already paid me back enough. Why are you trying to risk the rest of that life like that just for something like this?"

“It's… it's just because it's something I can do for you."

Olivia looked at me with great difficulty. Her eyes were shaking.

"This… this is the only way of living I know."

The look in her eyes was that of someone who’d only learned how to sacrifice herself for others while not knowing how to live for herself.

"If I have the opportunity to do something for the person that saved me, then I think I should absolutely do it, so that's why I did this. It's not anything bad either."

I kept thinking that Olivia was a strange person.

However, she really was weird. More bizarre than weird, actually.

She was someone who cared and worked harder for others than herself. She had

been weird for a long time, but no one thought of her as weird.

That was just the kind of person Olivia Lanze was.

That was why no one actually noticed her strangeness, not even me.

Someone who had been raised as the next head of the Knights Templar and a symbol of the future generation of the Five Major Churches couldn't have grown up normally. I didn't know what the environment she grew up in was like, but Olivia Lanze had been forced to live for the salvation of others rather than herself and her own desires.

So that was why she became someone like that.

Her faith, which was the root and foundation of all her actions, disappeared, but the way she lived her life remained the same.

Olivia Lanze didn't know how to live if it wasn't for others.

In a way, she resembled Ragan Artorius even more than Ellen. No, she was even worse than him.

If she had to die for the world, she was the kind of person who would just do so without hesitation.

There was only one reason why she could act like that…

Olivia looked at me with quivering pupils.

“I don't have anything I want to do at the moment. I have no direction, and I don't know what to live for anymore. I can do anything, but if it's something that could help you, I'd gladly do it. That's all."

Olivia Lanze was broken, not as a saint, but as a human being.

She was a saint, and always lived under that ideal, so she lived like a person who met all the requirements of a flawless saint.

However, Olivia Lanze, who could no longer be a saint, had no idea how to live her life like an ordinary person.

10,000 platinum coins was an unimaginable amount of money.

If we received that much money, our research funding issues would clearly be solved.

However, I didn't want to accept money that Olivia Lanze made by selling her own future.

“That… It's strange. You live your life for others before yourself. How could you just sacrifice your life like it's nothing?"

"…”

“No, I would understand if I was in danger of dying or something. While the issue of our research funding is important, no matter how much I think about it, this isn't something you should do just for that."

That was the real problem.

Olivia shouldn't go that far for something minor like that.

It was very odd that she was even willing to sell her future for it.

Olivia looked at me with a sad smile on her lips.

“Then, are you going to tell me?"

“…What?"

“How to live for myself… Can you tell me?"

My tongue froze at her words.

“Are you living for yourself?"

"…”

“You, too. Even though you don't know a single thing about magic, you're running

around like this for the sake of the Magic Research Society’s members."

Olivia's words stabbed right through my heart.

“What's the difference between you and me?"

I was working for the future, so I was a bit different from her.

—That was what I wanted to say, but it didn't leave my mouth.

In the end, both Olivia and I were devoting our time to things that had absolutely nothing to do with our own interests, the only difference was the importance.

“I'm not as good as you are, senior."

“Yes, I suppose so."

Olivia looked up at the night sky from where starlight seemed to pour down.

"You and I are equally strange."

I had absolutely nothing to refute that. Olivia, who had just blankly looked at the night sky, looked at me with slightly red eyes.

“How to live for ourselves… Should we figure that out together?"

"…”

Looking into Olivia Lanze's eyes that looked as if they would burst into tears at any moment, I thought for quite some time about how I should answer her.

There was only one answer I could give her…

“No naughty things."

"S-seriously! What do you actually think of me!"

Olivia raised her voice at my nonsensical bullshit, her face turning red.

“You reap what you sow, now what?"

"C-come on, I was just joking around! I… I'm! I'm not! I'm not that kind of person!"

“What do you mean by 'that kind of person'?"

“A-Arg! I think I now know why the kids hate you!"

Olivia seemed to have gotten genuinely angry and stayed like that for a while.

* * *

Since I knew what Olivia's plan had been, there was no need for us to go return to the banquet hall where the sponsorship meeting was held.

Nevertheless, we still returned to the hall.

If I didn't apologize after doing something as rude as dragging my senior out of the hall right in front of my homeroom teacher and the strongest knight of the continent, I would be bound to regret it.

Of course, I wasn't sure if Saviolin Turner and Mr. Epinhauser would forgive me.

“Erm, I'm sorry for that just now."

Mr. Epinhauser seemed to care little about the whole matter, and Saviolin Turner just stared at me like she’d done when we first met.

However, that look in her eyes made me feel less than human, so I quickly folded.

I didn't know whether she was angry or not.

Olivia started to mumble as she looked into the stern eyes of the continent's strongest knight.

"Erm, I really appreciate your offer, but as I thought… I would like to think a bit longer about it…”

“Yes, you still have a lot of time, so take your time thinking about it."

I didn't think she knew that Olivia Lanze, who had passed up on every offer, had that sudden change of heart because of me.

Scary. Just how much would it hurt to be hit by the strongest person in the world?

She had her eyes on Olivia Lanze, and she must have gotten the Imperial Family's permission to spend unbelievable amounts of money to get her.

Olivia Lanze…

Even though I was insanely grateful to her, she was usually just a flirty senior who kept clinging to me to the point of being annoying to me. Just how strong was she? It was at least to the extent that she wasn't surprised by the strongest person on the continent calling her the Empire's future.

I could clearly feel how Olivia Lanze's survival was an inflection point in history.

Saviolin Turner stared at me.

“Did you say you need research funds for magic research purposes?"

“Yes.”

“I heard you have supernatural powers, so why bother with magic?"

“You can think of it as letting my classmates focus on research, so I'm left in charge of external tasks."

Saviolin Turner, who had raised her head, looked at Olivia for about three seconds, then looked at me for about three seconds, and kept up that rhythm for a while.

She seemed to think about something very deeply.

That was what the look on her face suggested.

She seemed like a grown-up Ellen.

She was a calm person, but she actually had a cute side to her.

I didn't think that I could read her properly, but I could guess her thoughts to some extent.

At first, she seemed similar to Mr. Epinhauser, who was completely expressionless,

and yet, she was different from him.

'Olivia previously refused but asked for money as a condition to join us in order to help this kid's research.'

'Reinhardt must be very important to Olivia.'

'But considering that she withdrew her remark after she got dragged out by Reinhardt, she seems to be weak against him.'

'Hm… '

'Hmmm… '

'Then… '

'If I sponsor Reinhardt, who was able to influence Olivia, maybe she'll have a better opinion of Shanapell.'

'Wouldn't sponsoring Reinhardt serve as a means of increasing our influence on Olivia?'

'Reinhardt would have positive feelings towards Shanapell, and Olivia would surely be affected by that.'

'Certainly.'

'Perhaps… '

'Oh my… '

'Is he, maybe… a genius?'

She was the first person I could read even better than Adelia.

Perhaps because I had gotten accustomed to Ellen, I was able to detect emotional changes just by looking at her eyes and slight expression changes.

Was I slowly treading into the realm of being a mind reader?

Saviolin, who was deeply immersed in her own thoughts, looked at me.

“I'll sponsor you!"

“Ooh, thank you!"

As expected, even if not everything I read was right, it mostly matched her thoughts.

In the end, because Olivia Lanze was there with me, I was able to get sponsored by the leader of the First Division of the Imperial Knights.

Two of the most influential groups that participated in the sponsorship meeting had promised to sponsor me.

I was a lot more successful than I imagined I would be.

CHAPTER 245

In the end, Shanapell sponsored me just like the Merchant Guild had, and they said that they would give me an appropriate amount after an internal meeting.

That would mean that the one trillion won, the money used to make Olivia Lanze pledge to join them, was an amount that had been agreed on prior.

In that case, since that was the amount of money they wanted to use to catch Olivia, I certainly wouldn't receive that much.

Olivia also expressed her gratitude because she was very much moved by Shanapell's decision to sponsor me.

Saviolin Turner already seemed quite satisfied with Olivia's attitude.

It seemed to her that sponsoring me to influence Olivia was the right decision.

I secured sponsorships from two of the major organizations.

—The Merchant Guild and Shanapell.

That alone made the atmosphere around us a little strange.

"Ehem. Ehem, you said your name is Reinhardt?"

"Ah, yes."

“I'd like to talk a bit more about the sponsorship you just mentioned…”

.

.

"Mr. Reinhardt, may I speak to you for a moment?"

.

.

“I didn't hear what you said earlier because I was in a hurry…”

.

.

The atmosphere seriously turned strange all of a sudden.

There was only one reason for that…

The Merchant Guild’s master, Owen de Getmora, who was still sitting in one corner of the hall, was smiling at me.

Everyone thought that my plans were absurd, and even those who were strangers to magic could understand that fact.

However, what mattered were the results.

The 'fact' that the Merchant Guild and Shanapell promised to support me spread through the banquet hall like wildfire without my knowledge.

There was no way that the Merchant Guild would support something without reason, and there was also no way that the Knight Division, Shanapell, would uselessly support some magic research.

For those reasons, those people couldn't help but mistakenly believe that there was something to my projects.

The Merchant Guild's sponsorship was for the sake of getting closer to the Imperial Family, and Shanapell's sponsorship was to look good before Olivia Lanze.

However, the other sponsorship meeting attendees didn't know the details of my circumstances.

What was important was that those two major organizations that had absolutely nothing to do with magic decided to sponsor seemingly impossible magic research.

I literally turned from being seen as 'a strange guy who talked nonsense' to 'an extraordinary young man' in that hall.

…Just because I received two sponsorships for completely different reasons.

So those who ignored me before, believing that I just sprouted nonsense, suddenly changed their attitude, promising to sponsor me.

Sponsorships weren't investments, so even if they sponsored me, they weren’t guaranteed to receive anything in return. However, they believed in the discerning eyes of the Merchant Guild and Shanapell, an organization affiliated with the Imperial Family.

If the crazy things I was talking about were actually made, they wouldn't hold any stakes in them, but there was a certain advantage to just being remembered as the ones who had sponsored us.

And there was the phenomenon that people flocked to those that others flocked to.

So I was suddenly promised sponsorship by nearly 30% of the people attending the meeting.

That was probably Owen de Getmora's doing.

He created an environment in which he couldn't help but witness not only their interest in the amount the Merchant Guild promised to sponsor but also what they needed from me.

“…What's with this?"

“I'm a little surprised as well."

“I guess this is a good thing, right?"

“I guess so?"

Unfortunately, while I had a whole sponsorship list remaining before me, I wouldn't be able to remember all the names of those who promised to sponsor me.

Eventually, both my and Olivia's predictions turned out to be wrong, as I was able to secure a huge amount of sponsorships.

It felt even more ridiculous because I didn't achieve that with my own abilities but through a misunderstanding.

* * *

By the time the sponsorship meeting was over, Saviolin Turner came to visit me once again.

That time, it didn't seem to be about the sponsorship but some personal business. She had something to say to me privately, so she kept me away from Olivia.

I wondered what business she had with me.

“I heard about the matter with the Orbis Class, Reinhardt."

“Ah, yes…”

At Saviolin Turner's words, I looked towards Mr. Epinhauser standing further away. He’d really told her everything about me.

Originally, the sponsorship meeting was an event for both students and personnel of the Royal Class and Orbis Class. However, none of the members of the Orbis Class attended the event.

“You must know that you have made many enemies because of that, right?"

She lowered her voice to the point that no one else could hear her, talking to me as if to warn me.

“I know."

The trigger for the Orbis Class' closure due to internal problems was the duel between me and Oscar de Gardias.

The Orbis Class incident itself was already an inflection point of history, so I would have turned all of the students getting expelled and all of the teachers getting fired because of that incident into my enemies.

Of course, it would be useless to point their hatred towards me, but there would be many seeking to exact their revenge on me.

I knew that much. However, Saviolin Turner shook her head.

“Don't think that the Orbis Class will be your only enemies."

"…”

“How many people present in this hall do you think we're sponsoring the Orbis Class? No, how many people do you think refused to attend this meeting after hearing that the Orbis Class would be absent from this event?"

My whole body seemed to freeze up after hearing that.

“If the Orbis Class students, who were sponsored by them, were to be tried, sentenced to jail, or expelled, you would also incur the wrath of their sponsors."

The students who’d promised to join them or were being scouted by them and received a lot from them might get expelled.

All of the investments they had made in anticipation of their future would end up being in vain. Of course, they wouldn't lose their abilities, but there was a vast difference between an Orbis Class graduate and an expelled student.

If they even ended up having to serve prison time, they might end up being unable to accept them into their organization.

I not only turned the Orbis Class into my enemy but their sponsors as well. While not all of them would hate me, each and every one of them were decently powerful big shots.

If just one of them tried to drag me down, it would be fatal.

Saviolin Turner wanted to let me know about that fact before I went back to make me aware of those things that went on in the back that I had no idea about.

The fact was that I was in a much more dangerous position than I'd initially thought. I sighed when faced with her cold expression.

"The price I have to pay for just one single fight is much too high."

"There's a reason why people say not to use one's fists recklessly, after all."

I couldn't help feeling shocked because I never thought I would get that kind of advice from the strongest person on the continent.

"But it sure is strange…"

Saviolin looked at me.

"A guy like you strangely hasn't suffered from an early death."

She walked out of the banquet hall, a slight smile tugging on her lips.

Saviolin Turner, the world's strongest…

Anyway, maybe it was because she seemed similar to Ellen, but I felt like she was a good person.

To conclude…

I achieved my goal of securing sponsorships.

I also found out that it wouldn't be strange if I ended up dead at any given moment.

* * *

Olivia and I went back to the dorms after the sponsorship meeting that ended late at night. I didn't tell her that I was basically surrounded by enemies.

Knowing her personality, she would go on a rampage, saying that she would protect me even at night by standing next to my bed.

That would be even scarier.

"But I'm glad it still turned out pretty well."

"That's right. All thanks to you."

Olivia had suggested going to the sponsorship meeting, and she'd created that connection with Saviolin Turner.

So it was all thanks to her that I was able to safely secure the budget for the Magic Research Society. Olivia smiled at me.

"If you're grateful…"

Ah, she was going to ask for that again. She would ask me to kiss her again or such nonsense.

"Do you really…"

"H-huh?"

"Should we really do it?"

What was that all about?

It was night, so no one was around to watch us, so was that it?

Did she really want to kiss?

Olivia stuttered, her face so red that I could see it even in the darkness of the night, as she puckered her lips.

"Tsk, you're a scaredy-cat, so you're nothing but talk."

"What?! Scaredy-cat? Did you just call me scaredy-cat? I can do it! Can you, though?"

"What are you implying, girl?!"

While there weren't any people around to see it happen, there might still have been some who could hear us!

"You. Do you know that you're the only one in Temple, no, the whole continent, that ignored me like this?"

When I thought of it, that might've been true.

Wherever she went, she was praised as a saint, and everyone at the sponsorship meeting coveted her, but it seemed like I was the only one who treated her somewhat badly.

Olivia seemed mad, probably fed up with my attitude.

-Kiss!

"!"

Then she suddenly kissed me on the cheek.

No. That…

That girl…

All of a sudden?

She did stuff like that out of the blue sometimes, but that time it was so random that I couldn't help but be surprised.

So did she just act like she was a scaredy-cat then?

“You don't idolize me, you don't worship me, you don't force me or want me to act a certain way. You just take me for who I am."

Olivia spoke as she looked at me while I was still trying to return to my senses.

“That's why I like you."



She smiled brilliantly at me.

Olivia thought that I might freak out when I came to my senses, so she quickly ran out of my sight in an instant.

I couldn't believe that she was able to run so fast in a dress and those shoes.

Just looking at that fear, I could understand why Saviolin Turner coveted her talent so much.

-Slip!

-Arg!

Then one of her shoes' heels broke and she fell.

-Pre-pre-pretend you didn't see that!

Even without directly seeing it, I could guess what kind of expression Olivia currently wearing.

* * *

Ellen sat quietly on a sofa in the lobby at the entrance to the dorm.

She didn't know why she decided to sit there and not in her room. It was just that she felt like she couldn't bear it otherwise.

After seeing Olivia Lanze in a dress holding his hand and getting dragged somewhere outside of the training room's window view, she couldn't hold onto her training sword.

She heard that they were going to a sponsorship meeting or something.

—That was why she was wearing a dress. She knew that.

However, she still felt upset.

She couldn't do anything, so she just sat there.

That senior who was very close to Reinhardt…

That senior, after putting on a dress and even applying makeup, looked blindingly beautiful.

She'd heard that he was going there because of the Magic Research Society.

They wouldn't do anything. It was just a public event, she knew that.

However, Ellen was still anxious as she sat in the lobby.

She didn't even know why she was sitting there.

She didn't know what she was waiting for. She just couldn't bear not doing anything.

How many more hours would she sit there idly?

By the time the sun set and the night grew deeper, there were a few students who came and went through the lobby until she was the only one left sitting in that huge hall.

-Uurg, so embarrassing… that was so disgraceful…

Soon, an unfamiliar yet familiar voice sounded from the entrance.

While she was still a beauty one couldn't take their eyes off of in her off-shoulder dress, she was trudging into the dormitory with broken high heels in her hand.

Reinhardt wasn't with her.

When Olivia entered, she made eye contact with Ellen, who was still sitting on that sofa in the lobby.

"…Ah. You're our Reinhardt's friend. Hello."

"…Yes."

"What are you doing here at this hour?"

Olivia smiled as if she knew everything. Ellen didn't know why she entered holding

broken heels.

She also didn't know why she didn't return with Reinhardt.

She didn't know what she was doing there either.

She didn't know a lot.

However, she had a slightly strange feeling.

‘Our Reinhardt's friend… ’

That expression…

It felt oddly unpleasant.

‘Our Reinhardt's friend. ‘

It actually sounded more like she was saying 'my' than ‘our’.

No, she was just overthinking.

However, the other party looked at Ellen intently while wearing a strange, knowing smile.

“…Are you waiting for Reinhardt?"

“…Yes."

Unable to deny it, Ellen nodded her head.

“Why are you waiting for him?"

"…?"

Why?

Ellen hadn't thought about that. She was waiting for Reinhardt, that was true, but she didn't know why she was waiting for him. Olivia silently looked at Ellen, who was unable to find an answer to her question.

“You know what?"

“…What?"

“You're kind of annoying, you know?"

“…What?”

Ellen couldn't help but be shocked by her straightforward words.

They didn't really have many points of contact, she was just someone Ellen encountered from time to time, someone who was saved by Reinhardt, someone who helped him out with various things.

—A precious person of someone precious to her.

Then she had to be precious to her as well, right?

Ellen wasn't as good as that girl. Olivia just stared at her after calling her annoying.

“You really don't know?"

"I don't know what you mean."

In response to the other party's prickly attitude, Ellen responded to her, equally prickly.

Ellen, who usually always kept her composure was surprised that she acted like that.

“If you really don't know, continue living like that. Please continue to act all vaguely like you always do. I'm fine with that," Olivia whispered as she passed Ellen.

“Please take good care of our Reinhardt in the future as well."

"…”

She hadn't been mistaken.

The other girl was deliberately trying to piss her off. Ellen looked at Olivia Lanze's back as she walked away on her bare feet.

Also…

No matter if she was Reinhardt's benefactor or not…

She didn't like her.

Soon after, Reinhardt returned.

“What's wrong with your face? Did something happen?"

“…No."

"Are you mad?"

“No. I'm not mad."

“Erm… Did I… do something wrong?"

“No, you didn't do anything wrong."

Reinhardt hadn’t done anything wrong.

However…

Somehow, something akin to sadness that she shouldn't have felt wiggled inside her heart.

Ellen hated herself for that.

Reinhardt kept sticking next to her, asking if she was okay, why she was doing that, and if it was because of something he did.

Ellen didn't know why, but that made her feel better in the end.

CHAPTER 246

Our Magic Research Society meeting was held a few days later.

“Wh… What's all this?"

“Sponsorship money, what else?"

I could show the others the letters of sponsorship that had arrived from the Royal Class Student Council.

Everyone was at a loss for words. Even Harriet, who had nothing to envy when it came to riches, was out of her mind.

[First Knight Division of the Imperial Knights, Shanapell] - 400 platinum coins

[Merchant Guild] - 300 platinum coins

[Magic Association] - 100 platinum coins

[Count Kräusen] - 50 platinum coins

[Knights of Raslan] - 10 platinum coins

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Numerous sponsorships arrived from those groups that handled things quickly.

Platinum coins had a value of 100 gold coins. That meant that one platinum coin was equivalent to 100 million won.

So Shanapell sponsored us 40 billion won and the Merchant Guild 30 billion won.

That was the price Shanapell was willing to pay for Olivia's favor.

And the Merchant Guild was willing to pay that much to have a friendly relationship with the Imperial Family.

It was an even bigger amount than I had expected.

The Student Council's support hadn't been decided yet because they couldn't just decide on those kinds of things with a few phrases.

However, at that point, the Student Council's support wasn't even necessary anymore.

“This isn't all, there'll be a lot more. Of course, those directly from organizations have pretty much arrived in full."

We collected nearly 100 billion won in sponsorships. Of course, it wouldn't have been that much if not for Shanapell and the Merchant Guild.

Many unusual coincidences had combined to bring forth that incredible amount that far exceeded all expectations.

All of them were looking at me as if I was a god of money after seeing all the sponsorships I got from the sponsorship meeting.

I couldn't believe it either, but it was even harder for them.

Louis Ancton, our treasurer, was more surprised than anyone.

“Is it not enough?"

“No… How could that be?"

That's what he said, but we never knew what could happen later. Money, especially when it's a budget, was something one never knew when and how much one would have to use.

Harriet, in particular, was sitting there, speechless, with the corners of her mouth

twitching slightly.

"I don't think you guys would to anything stupid, but we have to be transparent about our expenditures. The sponsors who gave us the funds might be interested in what we're doing, so I have to report our budget usage and balance regularly. Got that?"

"Yes, understood."

Our original budget was also quite huge, but we were able to get an even bigger one, so Louis seemed bewildered and slightly frightened. Well, it was because it would turn into a big deal if he ended up filling out the ledgers incorrectly.

Seeing Harriet completely speechless was rather amusing.

When I created that club called the Magic Research Society, I never thought things would turn out like that.

I only planned to make the club and let them run it on their own, but I ended up becoming a member, its president even, and even listened to Harriet's joking request to get more money.

Even though I wasn't that skilled in dealing with people.

If I hadn't become the president of the club, it was clear that it wouldn't have been able to run properly.

"You've worked hard, Reinhardt."

Adelia said as such. She expressed her sincere gratitude.

After her, the others also said their thanks one after the other.

Harriet still looked bewildered.

"Y-you… You really got more…"

She thought I got placed last in the midterms because I struggled with her unreasonable demand of increasing our funds.

However, I ended up producing results that far exceeded her imagination.

Of course, I wouldn't have been able to do that without Olivia's help, but my connection to her could also be counted as my power.

"I… don't really know what's what anymore."

Harriet sighed as she looked at me.

“Good job. Thank you."

It made me feel weird when Harriet expressed her gratitude so sincerely. They looked up to me as if I was some god of the Magic Research Society even though I didn't know a thing about magic.

“As long as you know. Just do what you were told, you punks. You can't use the lack of funds as an excuse anymore, got it?"

Get to work!

“Right…”

Everyone sighed as if they expected that things would end up like that.

* * *

The Magic Research Society was back on track.

It wasn't like they produced any proper results, the foundation for them to produce some was just laid out.

Over time, they might complain about the lacking budget again, but they probably wouldn't for the rest of that year at least.

I told them to use as much as they needed if they had something they needed. It would be funny if they couldn't progress in their research because of money problems.

But just because I told them to spend as much as they wanted didn't mean that they would spend more than 100 billion won in a month, right?

The construction of the stores at every train station was also in progress. We had the space, permits were granted, and investments were received.

Setting up the shops wasn't something that took a lot of time.

Suddenly, seeing a simple convenience store built in the station near Temple made me feel strange for some reason.

I mean, it all started with some words I said, after all.

I wondered if it was what one would call a sense of accomplishment. I silently realized that people in business gained their sense of accomplishment through means other than money as well

The items sold in the store were no different from the ones sold in modern convenience stores. They sold things like simple meals for those who skipped their breakfast and small things they might have forgotten but might need, like tissues.

While there weren't crowds of people, there was a steady amount coming and going.

It reminded me of the saying that people didn't know what they wanted until they got it.

The station was just a stopover, and they probably never felt the need to buy anything inside of it or get some food to eat on the go.

But if the stores were to disappear, the people would feel greatly inconvenienced.

Just as people who were able to live without a smartphone before started to feel anxious at some point when they didn't have their smartphone with them.

Similarly, as shown in the original novel's development, wizards, who had used magic according to their own mana pools before, ended up unable to fight properly without power cartridges later on.

Something that people needed but didn't know they needed…

That was where value came from.

"So what else other than that is there?"

"Hmm…"

I directed a question at Eleris.

She was in her semi-basement apartment. The moldy scent had disappeared, perhaps because she'd cleaned up and taken some measures against it.

I told her that I had created the Magic Research Society and planned on developing various things and that I had brought in quite a huge amount of funds.

Eleris made a fuss, saying that she didn't know I could do those things.

Her reaction to the things I wanted to make was similar to other people's.

"Something people don't even know is greatly convenient to them… Hmm…"

Eleris agonized over my question, but it seemed like she didn't come up with anything.

"I don't really know much about business, and I don't understand why you're doing these things."

* * *

There was no doubt that making my classmates stronger had nothing to do with reconstructing the Demon Realm.

"However, my specialty… is magic. I feel like it won't be worth the money."

"It's okay. I just asked you to say whatever came to mind, not to come up with an alternative."

Eleris concentrated for a bit, making a flame appear above her hand.

"This is ignition magic."

"I guess."

A spell that was the lowest of the low-ranking ones. It was such a low-ranking spell that the only thing it could be used for was to light a campfire. Where was she going

with that? In my eyes, Eleris was simply staring at the flame she had created.

“I can multicast this spell dozens of times with my current mana pool. I also wouldn't have to chant. This is only possible because I'm very familiar with the spell."

“…Is that so?"

“By the way, I chanted this time. I had to."

After all, it was an advanced field of study, and as an outsider, I couldn't understand what Eleris was trying to tell me."

"It's a low-ranking spell that doesn't require chanting. However, you had to chant just now?"

“Yes."

“Why did you need to chant?"

“Because I used the magical power around me, and not within me, to cast the fire spell."

“What…?”

Wizards used their internal magical power to cast spells. Therefore, the rank of one's Magic stat signified the amount of magical power held in one's body.

‘However, using atmospheric magical power, as I read in some comics, is that even possible in this world?’

“Isn't that method of using external magical power like one's internal magical power that you mentioned meant to be used to overcome the lack of magical power inside one's body?"

“Yeah."

“So what I'm trying to say is that the current method was also designed to relieve some of the inconveniences people felt at that time."

“By ‘inconvenient’, you mean…”

“Yes, casting magic using external magical power is many times more difficult than using one's internal magical power to activate spells because we would have to instantly calculate and estimate the amount of energy that has to constantly flow into us."

Was it the same concept as a car having to constantly draw gas from outside without having a fuel tank?

I couldn't understand it exactly, but I felt like I had a good idea of what she meant.

“A long time ago, ancient magic worked like this. That's why magic was seen as a special ability only a few were chosen to use, even fewer than today. There weren't even 100 wizards on the continent back then, and they weren't really powerful, either. If I were to cast magic as they did back then, I wouldn't be able to cast large-scale magic."

“…So you're saying that the current method to invoke magic was created to relieve the inconvenience of casting spells while having to control the flow of the external magical power?"

“Yes."

Just as the power cartridges were created to break through the limits of magic, the already established method was also created to break through certain limits.

“People find it easier to control the magical power inside their bodies, which is why several methods to increase one's internal mana pool were researched. That's the form of magic that has become commonplace after its long history, so the accessibility of magic has greatly increased compared to the old days."

There was a way to use nature's magical power…

It was just a method that had long been abandoned for centuries because it was too difficult.

“I don't really know what people find inconvenient nowadays, so I just wanted to say that today's magic is the more comfortable version of the past magic… I don't know how this information will help you, though."

I guess she just said whatever came to her mind.

I grinned.

“No, you were a big help."

Difficult didn't mean impossible.

Harriet de Saint-Owan, who had become able to use nature's magical power…

Wouldn't she turn into the Goddess of Destruction, then?

Just imagining that was terrifying.

Of course…

“Y-you! Why are you only doing this to me?! Why are you always giving me the hardest thing to do?! Why am I the only one who has to do this?!"

Harriet actually started to cry when I told her to research how to make use of the atmospheric magical power to cast magic.

* * *

Magic operated with external magical power…

I wondered if it was unreasonable to ask Harriet to try the method that even Eleris struggled with even though she had the best talent in the field of magic. Harriet cried when I gave her another task as nonsensical as researching dimensional magic.

She seemed to misunderstand that I only did it to tease her.

After she calmed down a bit, I started to speak again.

“No, I really just asked to do this because I genuinely think that you can do it. I'm not trying to bully you here. Am I crazy?"

"You are!"

Ah…

Right…

But not when it came to that. I did tend to talk bullshit just to tease her, but that absolutely wasn't the case at that moment!

"True, but you haven't even tried yet, so how can you just refuse, you punk?"

"Won't people only use that kind of method because they're stupid? Modern magic theory was created by people much smarter and better than—"

"What if they're all stupid?"

“…Huh?"

When I cut off her words and interjected, Harriet, with tears in her eyes, was shocked.

“What if all those people who created the current magic theory were a lot dumber than you?"

“Wh-what… What do you mean?"

“Every wizard in history could have been a lot dumber than you."

That meant that she was just following a path paved by idiots.

Of course, they were all smarter than me, but Harriet could be a lot smarter than them.

She held the greatest magic talent in history, not just in the Saint-Owan family. Harriet would be able to make the impossible possible.

Harriet seemed genuinely taken aback by my ridiculous praise that went far beyond boldness.

Her face didn't even turn red.

“Are… Are you serious?"

“Of course I am."

Harriet looked at me.

She seemed to be trying to find out my hidden intentions, suspicious points, and any signs that I was just doing it to make fun of her.

But there are no such things. I believed that Harriet had more talent and was a lot smarter as an archwizard than all other wizards that existed in history.

“Hey… Just how much of a genius do you think I am? On what grounds? Don't even dare…”

“On the continent. No, regardless of race, I believe that you will be the greatest wizard in all of history. You know my talent."

“Ah, yes."

Self Suggestion…

I looked at Harriet with an unwavering gaze, ready to bet everything on her, not myself.

“That's what I believe."

It might’ve seemed like it was just a usage of Self Suggestion, but it was actually true.

“So trust me, shut up, and do what you're told."

“You always end things like this!"

In the end, I couldn't help but enjoy Harriet making a fuss.

CHAPTER 247

Researching a magic system that made use of atmospheric magical power right after Dimensional Magic…

Eventually, it seemed like Harriet was willing to at least try. I really believed she could do it.

I did feel sorry, though. I really believed in her, but I couldn't help but realize that I only made her do things that simply seemed too difficult.

I thought it would be good to take some time off, so I reduced the times I visited the Magic Research Society, and I spent more time on my personal training.

I was taking Magic Body Strengthening classes, but while I felt a lot better than before, I still hadn't gotten the hang of it yet.

Ellen, who had used that ability to roll snowballs, was already fully used to the power.

“You're really weird."

“What?"

Ellen looked at me with a sullen expression as I answered with annoyance.

“Let's use the word ‘special’ instead of ‘weird’, Reinhardt."

The yoga master teacher patted my shoulder as if trying to keep us from fighting.

“Reinhardt is by no means untalented. I can see that you are slowly getting more proficient in your mana control."

“…Really?"

“Indeed."

While I wasn't even sure about that, on what basis was that guy saying those things?

But it might be true if it was him who said it. I still wasn't that sure, though…

In the Magic Body Strengthening Class I had with Ellen, she learned so quickly that she was being taught how to control her magical power with more sophistication and finesse while I was still in the middle of the most basic steps.

I was sure that I could be considered a great genius as well.

However, the problem was I was always next to that shocking person, so who would even call me a genius?

No matter what I did, I was always inferior to Ellen.

Swordsmanship, Magic Body Strengthening.

No, one couldn't even say that I was on the same level as her when she was in my situation.

Did those in the magic major feel the same way when they were around Harriet?

The yoga master told me not to just follow the class with sincerity and work hard and not feel too disappointed because Ellen was simply outstanding and I achieved a lot in my own right as well.

So…

If you heard those words about a dozen times, your heart wouldn't feel comforted, on the contrary, you'd feel uncomfortable and stuffy.

Magic Body Strengthening classes were kind of like a special additional class, so there were no tests or grades. The lectures also took place after the first-year classes were over, and I was even specially added to that class in the middle of the semester.

So normally, classes would end at 1 pm for us, but on days where we had Magic Body Strengthening classes, they would end around half-past 3 pm.

There wasn't anything difficult about the Magic Body Strengthening class because it didn't put a strain on one's body.

What was interesting was that I could feel my magical power increasing just by attending the Magic Body Strengthening Classes. Of course, it wasn't by a lot.

If my Magic stat reached rank A, I would awaken the talent ‘Mana Dominance’, however, that was still far off.

It was something I could only dream of after Moonshine was fully developed.

On my way to the dorm after class…

It was already around fall, so it would get dark even when it was still early.

“Where are you going?"

Ellen left the building where our classes were held and went in the opposite direction of our dormitory.

“I'm going to the gray-haired lady."

“…Oh, really?"

Ellen used to visit Loyar from time to time to get beaten up, but she didn't go to her that often anymore those days.

Did she want to go because she grew more confident in her Magic Body Strengthening and wanted to see how she would fare against Loyar?

“Then, let's go together."

I knew that the business was going well, but I really wanted to see what it would be like if those two fought.

“Okay."

Ellen nodded and took the lead.

The skirt of Ellen's uniform swayed gently in the autumn winds.

* * *

From the moment one became able to strengthen one's power with magical power, the individual's combat power would rise dramatically.

No matter how skilled they were, it was very difficult for people who didn't know how to use Magic Body Strengthening to perform many-on-one battles.

To succeed, they would have to equip themselves with heavy armor like plate armor, but if they did that, their mobility would be reduced.

However, Magic Body Strengthening was even able to protect one's body with the magical power released while also strengthening it.

There was no more need to wear heavy armor or similar equipment for protection, and one's physical abilities were also greatly increased, so one's mobility would far exceed that of ordinary humans, and normal swords wouldn't even be able to touch one's body.

It would basically make people who used it walking tanks.

-Kaang!! Kakong!

That was what I was thinking while watching Ellen and Loyar continuously clashing with each other in the forest with magical power emitting from their bodies.

I was thinking that it didn’t make any sense.

The sun had already set, so all I could see was a mass of blue flames and Loyar getting fiercely blown away.

In this kind of genre, there was a preconceived notion that, in a fight between a warrior and a wizard, the warrior would usually have the advantage.

I could help but confirm it with my own eyes at that moment.

Even if the wizard did their best to fly and crawl around, if a human tank clad in blue flames rushed towards them at a fierce speed, they surely wouldn't be able to keep

their cool and chant spells.

And there also existed the concept of magic resistance…

In order to not fall to some insignificant low-ranking spells, warriors underwent magic resistance training. We would even receive that training from our second year onwards in Temple.

Low-ranking spells wouldn't work, and high-ranking ones that might work required a lot of time to cast.

However, after a tenth of a second, the tip of a warrior's sword would have already pierced their neck, so that was impossible.

If one looked at it like that, I felt like Redina's talent, ‘No Cast’, was even more ridiculous than Harriet's.

It ended after a long fight with Ellen breathing heavily and canceling her Magic Body Strengthening.

“Huff… Huff…”

Loyar also deactivated her Magic Body Strengthening and shook her hands.

Despite having gotten somewhat accustomed to the ability, Loyar was still able to overpower Ellen.

Even so, it was Loyar who was stunned.

“What a monstrous kid."

She might have reacted that way because Ellen's growth rate was a lot faster than she thought.

That was understandable. That girl who didn't even know how to use Magic Body Strengthening properly a month prior was using it so skillfully.

“What mistakes did I make?"

Ellen caught her breath and looked at Loyar as if asking for advice. Loyar seemed to

ponder for a bit but slowly opened her mouth.

“You're too rough."

"Rough?"

“You release too much magical power. Your being able to do that is surprising, but it's very easy to burn out because you use up your power too quickly. A normal person wouldn't be able to fight for more than 10 seconds at best if they used their power like that. You were only able to hold on for so long because your amount of inert magical power is so ridiculously huge."

"…”

“Your first steps were pretty weird. You get what I'm saying?"

“Yes."

Ellen had realized how to use Magic Strengthening in real combat situations. At that time, what she needed most was explosive and powerful strength, so Ellen would strengthen herself with magical power, fighting as if she was almost exploding with extreme power.

“But I heard changing this is quite difficult."

“…I guess. You did it because you didn't learn it properly. It's going to take a lot of hard work."

Magic Body Strengthening was like magic in the end. While there weren't schools, there were multiple ways to awaken to it called ‘Visions’. Each order of knights had a different one, and the Imperial Family as well as noble families certainly had their own ‘Visions’ as well.

We had to learn Temple's ‘Vision’. It was a very good one.

We would slowly learn how to do it one step at a time and build upon a foundation.

However, Ellen had made her own ‘Vision’ by herself, and since she’d already made one, no other ‘Vision’ would be able to work for her.

Just as Ellen had heard those things from the yoga master, I had also heard and come to understand those matters.

Ellen's Magic Body Strengthening had already become something she couldn't do any other than her own way.

Her explosive strength was very powerful but was not sustainable for a long time.

If one realized how to use Magic Body Strengthening in their own way, one didn't have any other choice but to use that way.

Like Ellen, I had to do the same.

I still didn't know what my Magic Body Strengthening's characteristics were. However, I would also have my own way to use it, and it would be very different from the method Temple taught.

That was why the yoga master couldn't teach us Temple's 'Vision', so he merely gave us Magic Body Strengthening classes in the form of assisting us.

"The output itself is too heavy and overflowing. That's why you should increase your endurance by adjusting the amount of magical power you control."

"Yes, understood."

However, Loyar said that it would be incredibly difficult.

If she became able to adjust her output, it would be good for her in the end.

She would be capable of strengthening herself to ridiculous heights and also just giving herself a small boost.

Thinking back to the time where she used it to the point of fainting, I believed that it would be the right choice.

She continued to train using her magical power in moderation.

"By the way, I have a question…"

"What is it? I'm not obligated to answer."

“Are you of the master class, Aunty?"

Master class…

If one used a Lance, one could become a lancemaster, and if one used a sword, one could become a swordmaster.

All those who had reached a high level of mastery in their field were collectively referred to as being ‘master class’.

In the case of Saviolin Turner, who I had met recently, she was a swordmaster. The yoga master was probably of the master class as well. However, I couldn't tell just what the hell kind of master he was.

Ellen was curious about if Loyar was in the master class.

Reaching master class was the next step after mastering Magic Body Strengthening.

One would enter the master class if one could apply magical power to their weapon in their strengthened state.

For example, something like sword qi or sword aura would be possible, however, those that were of the master class were very few in number.

And Saviolin Turner was recognized as the strongest of the very few master classes.

If the criteria for entering the master class was to extend Magic Body Strengthening to objects not part of one's body, weren't those that used their fists already part of the master class as soon as they learn Magic Body Strengthening? Probably not. There might be other criteria as well.

Loyar grinned at Ellen's question.

“If you call me ‘big sis’ from now on, I'll answer."

At that, Ellen looked at her with a puzzled expression on her face and shook her head.

“…That's too much."

“You really need your ass kicked."

That day, Ellen was literally beaten half to death.

* * *

On our way back to Temple…

I carried Ellen on my back.

“It hurts…”

If someone who usually didn't exaggerate things acted like that, it meant she was really hurt.

Ellen tended to act particularly obnoxious towards Loyar, who was already very temperamental. I didn't know why she did it, but she seemed to have fun doing so.

“Then why did you say something that would get you beaten up?"

“…I don't want to hear that from you."

“…Right."

* * *

Speaking of unnecessary, it wasn't like it was my job to pick fights left and right every day, but that?

Ellen was literally hanging limply on my back as if her whole body was in tremendous pain.

“By the way, why do you only act this way to big sis?"

My curiosity flared up again. She had, of course, been terribly defeated by Loyar and had continued to lose against her ever since they’d met, and even after she learned Magic Body Strengthening, she still wasn't her match. However, even though she knew Loyar didn't want to be called that, she continued to do it as if she was trying to tease her and force her to hit her.

I knew that she had to do it for me back then, but she mostly did it for her own sake.

Loyar had said that she would answer her question if she called her big sis, but when Ellen said that it was simply too much, her eyes had almost popped out.

Just how much did she want to tease her?

Loyar was easy to jump to violence, so if Ellen provoked her just a little, she would always end up getting hit and turned into a rice cake.

She even ended up whining about the pain she felt from the beating.

“…Because you'll give me a piggyback ride."

“…What?"

“Because you always carry me when this happens."

If she got beaten up that badly, she wouldn't be able to move.

…Then I would help her get back by carrying her.

That was why she provoked her?

“…Are you a kid?"

That was a bit disconcerting.

She wasn't the type to say those kinds of things.

Ellen calmly put her arms around my neck. I felt that, perhaps because she was in a weakened state, I could shake them off with just a slight movement.



However, I definitely felt kind of troubled by it.

Ellen's breath on my nape made a strange feeling well up inside of me.

"…"

Ellen didn't say anything.

I had nothing to say as well.

Just when that gentle silence was enveloping us…

['Preview' can be activated.]

"…"

I couldn't help but stop walking when that message suddenly appeared before me.

It was a function I had only used once so far. A cheat I got during Olivia Lanze's incident that could only be used once a day when active.

I didn't know the exact context, but I thought that it was a sign that something important was about to happen.

During Olivia Lanze's incident, I ran all over the place and then ended up using Preview.

However, that time, I somehow had a bad feeling about it.

[Preview - 100 Achievement Points]

It didn't show me multiple options like it did last time.

Only the Preview option worth 100 points appeared.

“…What's the matter?"

Ellen wiggled slightly and asked me when she felt that the atmosphere around me had turned weird.

“No, it's nothing."

I had 5730 achievement points.

I had no reason to not take a look.

[Achievement Points used.]

The world around me froze, and a point in the world's future was projected into my eyes.

Year 323 of the Imperial Calendar. October 23rd, Tuesday.

Today's date.

That meant that the incident might happen soon.

I saw myself right in front of my eyes.

I was down on the ground.

A penetrating wound around my stomach could be seen.

I was lying in a pool of blood.

Ellen was also leaning against a wall with a deep sword wound on her chest next to me. Her eyes were out of focus.

Ellen and I…

We were going to die soon.

As soon as I regained my senses and returned to reality, I had goosebumps all over my body.

Ellen and I were about to be killed by someone. Ellen, who I was carrying on my back, didn't appear to be hurt, but she couldn't lift a single finger in her state.

I wasn't sure what would happen, but I was certain that Ellen wouldn't be able to lift her arms, much less fight.

By who, for what reason, and under which circumstances will we be killed?

*"...*What's wrong? Are you hurt? Am I too heavy?"

"No."

Unaware of the situation, Ellen saw the strange expression on my face.

Was I the target? Was it both Ellen and me? Did they kill me and then just kill off Ellen, the witness?

While it wasn't certain, it seemed highly likely that the target was me.

Nothing was known yet.

There was an assassin after us in a situation where Ellen wasn't able to make use of her power.

Should I just go back to the Rotary Gang?

No, that place was only barely populated.

There had been nobody around my corpse in my vision.

We might get caught off guard on our way back to the Rotary Gang.

There had been no signs of battle on my body.

That meant I had been unaware of the attack.

It had been a surprise attack, then. We had been attacked by an assassin close to a sparsely-populated place.

We had to go to a crowded place.

The Rotary Gang's headquarters was built at the southern edge in a deserted place in the Imperial Capital, so the best time to attack us would be when we were on our way back.

I didn't know the exact location, but one thing was certain…

It would happen soon.

Whether I should go back to the Rotary Gang and get protected by Loyar or go to the nearest station as quickly as possible and board a mana train…

I had to choose one of the two.

My heart was beating like crazy. I felt like I was about to lose my composure after I suddenly found out that I was about to be killed.

I would be dead soon, and so would Ellen.

I had to make a quick judgment.

Should I use Writer's Advice?

No, the incident was about to happen, and there was time to ruminate over what I would get from Writer's Advice. I had to trust my intuition.

Thankfully, the damn bastard didn't want me to die in vain. That was probably why he'd informed me about it.

"Reinhardt, calm down."

"…"

"What's wrong? What happened?"

Ellen whispered cautiously to me, seeming worried because I'd suddenly broken out in cold sweat.

But I wasn't in any state to answer her at the moment.

Although it was a place with few people, that didn't mean that there weren't some pedestrians.

Was it him?

Or that person over there?

Or maybe all of them?

It was impossible for me to find out who, when, and in what way would attack us, so everyone around us looked suspicious to me.

I didn't even feel alive anymore. I didn't know what to call it.

The wounds seemed to have been caused by a penetrating, sword-like weapon.

The chances that we would be sniped with a long-range weapon were rather low.

It was pretty dangerous going back to the Rotary Gang. We could just get attacked on our way back.

The moment my life was at stake, I had to choose between those uncomfortable choices.

"I'm going to run. Hold on."

"Yes."

Putting strength into my arms and holding onto Ellen, I started sprinting towards the train station.

I can't let her die.

—That was the only thing going through my head.

CHAPTER 248

Fortunately, no one tried to attack us until I reached the train station while carrying Ellen on my back.

Did they give up on the opportunity because they thought I noticed them? An assassin literally specialized in assassination, not fighting… The possibility that they thought I noticed their plot and just stepped off was pretty high.

Even after I arrived at the station and boarded the mana train, I didn't neglect to harbor a continued wariness towards my surroundings.

We obviously overcame the imminent assassination. However, there was a high chance that only the location of the assassination had changed and that it would still occur elsewhere.

“What's wrong with you, Reinhardt. What happened?"

When we got on the mana train I kept watching my surroundings while dripping cold sweat, so Ellen could only watch me with a worried look.

I had been carrying Ellen on my back up to that point, but then she stepped down. The mana train wasn't full, so there were some empty seats, but I still decided to stand.

Without saying a word, I grabbed Ellen by the scruff of her neck and pulled her into my arms.

"Why are you… so suddenly…”

“Stay still for a sec. Don't do anything."

Ellen seemed surprised when I suddenly hugged her.

That girl was weak at the moment. Ellen couldn't fight in her state.

I decided it would be best to go to whichever place was nearest. If anyone tried to

attack us, I would immediately summon Tiamata. None of the other passengers seemed to particularly care about Ellen and me.

I could only feel the gazes of those wearing Temple uniforms wondering whether we were dating.

I kept my distance from the other passengers so that I could keep an eye on them as I held Ellen in my arms.

As for Ellen, she did as I told her and stayed silent with no questions asked.

It was a cool day…

And yet, I was swearing all over.

“Smells like sweat…”

Ellen, who had her nose right up to my chest, grumbled softly.

"Stay still."

“…Yes."

At my sharp words, Ellen replied in a slightly hesitant voice.

* * *

Nothing happened on the train until we reached Temple Station.

Unlike the Rotary Gang's headquarters, Temple Station had a very large floating population.

I waited for the crowd to disperse when we got off. Ellen knew that I was serious, so she stuck to me without a single question.

Slowly, after I looked in every direction, I left the station. While the assassin might not be there, there was a chance that they were still following us.

Night had already fallen, but there was still a huge amount of people coming and going around Temple.

Still, I couldn’t feel relieved yet.

That person was a madman who would simply kill people on the roadside. If they judged that it was impossible for them to assassinate us in secret, there was a good chance that they wouldn't hesitate to just try offing us anyway.

I supported Ellen on my side as we slowly headed towards Temple's entrance.

I didn't know if we would be safe inside Temple, but I at least hoped so. If the assassin was an outsider, they wouldn't be able to get in.

Even if we couldn't feel relieved yet, we could at least eliminate some possibilities by choosing to return to Temple.

I slowly but surely headed towards Temple while preparing to summon Tiamata the moment anyone from the crowd got too close to us.

It felt like a thousand years passed.

As I went through Temple's entrance, a familiar view unfolded before me.

Only a few faculty members and students were walking about; no one looked suspicious.

However, even when we were outside, no one looked particularly suspicious either.

Did the assassin give up?

Did they return because it seemed like I noticed them?

Even while taking the tram to the Royal Class’s dormitory, I still kept my guard up.

I was finally able to relax when I arrived at the dorms.

My heart, which felt like it was about to explode before, beat even harder.

I’d survived.

The assassin hadn’t made a move on us. Whatever it might have been, I was able to avoid death for the day.

My legs felt weak.

"Is it… okay now?"

Ellen didn't know what was going on, so when she saw that I was relieved, her anxiety also flew away.

I silently hugged Ellen.

"Wh-why are you doing this…?"

Ellen hugged me, who was still trembling, back. It seemed like she was trying to tell me to calm down.

I didn't say anything.

I couldn't say anything.

Was I afraid of my own death or Ellen's?

Anyway, that fear was gone for the moment.

That was it.

* * *

With the priest on duty's help, Ellen returned to her original strength.

I explained the situation to her in the training room in the middle of the night. I couldn't tell her everything, though.

“Who tried to kill us?"

“I don't really know the details, but it's just how it felt back then."

“…Shouldn't you get counseling?"

Ellen couldn't help but feel like I was just paranoid.

I couldn't explain the "Preview" function to her, so in the end, other than telling me

to go get some help for my neurosis, she didn't have anything else to say.

If the assassin had attacked us, she would have known that I was telling the truth, but since nothing ended up happening, it was no wonder she didn't believe me.

That assassin must have been quite the prudent person.

Even after thoroughly thinking about it, anyone would suspect schizophrenia or paranoia if someone just suddenly stopped in their tracks and said someone was trying to kill them.

“To be exact, they were probably trying to kill me, not you."

“…You? Why?"

“A while ago, I went to the Sponsorship Meeting to get research funds for the Magic Research Society, right?"

“Yes. You did."

“I met a person named Saviolon Turner there."

“I know her. The Captain of Shanapell."

Ellen showed that she recognized the name.

"She told me that, due to the incident with the Orbis Class, I had made a lot of enemies."

The massive restructuring of the Orbis Class and the damages caused by it… The displeasure of its sponsors and supporters… Saviolin had told me that there had to be a lot of people who hated me because I was the cause of it all.

However, I never thought that they would try to kill me. Of course, those people weren't the only suspects. Maybe someone was trying to kill me for a completely different reason that I was unfamiliar with.

“I don't know…”

Ellen still seemed to find it difficult to understand why I’d suddenly acted the way I

did in that situation.

“Still, if you're in danger, you shouldn't leave Temple."

“…You're right."

Ellen wasn't really sure if there had been an assassination attempt on me, but she agreed that I was in danger.

She looked at me in silence.

After all the trouble I caused, I ended up making numerous enemies that I couldn't handle on my own.

“Don't die."

“I won't die."

“If you die, I'll die as well."

“What are you saying all of a sudden?"

“I'll kill the person that killed you, and then I'll die as well."

Ellen silently looked at me with her usual calm expression.

“So, please, don't do anything dangerous."

That was the main point she wanted to convey. Ellen held my hands as she spoke.

"I don't really know what happened, but… You suddenly felt that someone was going to kill you and me as well… that's how it was, right?"

Ellen seemed to think that I was trying to protect her from start to finish.

“…Right."

“…If I ever become a burden to you in that kind of situation, just leave me. I'll be fine…”

"Don't spout bullshit."

With those words, I pulled Ellen away from me and looked into her eyes.

“You aren't the only one."

Ellen said that she could die for me.

Just as Ellen had found conviction in the Darklands, I had realized during that heart-racing return to Temple, even though nothing happened…

"I can die for you as well."

I couldn't take back those words anymore.

At my words, Ellen's eyes shook greatly. She suddenly raised her hand as she looked at me.

-Flick!

“Arg!"

“What nonsense are you spouting?"

Then, Ellen smiled, returning the flick and answer I gave her in the past.

“Make something. I'm hungry."

I couldn't look at the smiling Ellen properly.

* * *

Just because nothing happened didn't mean that it was the end of it.

[Event Quest Appeared - Assassination Threat]

[Description : Someone is trying to kill you. Crush or subdue the origin of this threat.]

[Reward: One related trait]

An Event Quest appeared after such a long time.

Its compensation was quite abstract. However, quests that gave traits as rewards usually weren't lacking.

Still, that situation in which my life was at stake couldn't be measured by mere compensation. It was something I had to do even if I didn't receive a reward for it.

Preview didn't only help me to avoid death, but it also created a problem for me to solve.

Someone, or some group, was trying to kill me. I needed to identify them. They might have been a huge group or just some vengeful individuals.

But just who the hell was trying to kill me and for what reason?

The biggest suspects were the Orbis Class supporters. However, in that case, it would be simple revenge. Killing me wouldn't necessarily change anything.

No one else came to mind off the top of my head, but I wanted to at least make sure that I found the assassin that tried to kill me.

While it didn't actually happen, he would have killed both me and Ellen.

I had to find them.

I didn't care whether it was right or wrong to take revenge for something that actually didn't happen.

Someone who did those kinds of things deserved to die.

He didn't kill me, and he didn't kill Ellen either, but he'd tried to.

I had to find and kill them.

…And I would find out who was behind it and make them pay as well.

It was the first time in my life that I had such cruel thoughts, but I didn't feel any aversion to them.

I didn't feel relieved. I didn't feel comfortable knowing that I was surrounded by enemies as soon as I stepped outside of Temple. There could've also been someone inside of Temple who was trying to kill me.

I couldn't let my guard down.

I always wore the disposable protection bracelet.

While listening to my classes and walking around campus, I always paid attention to my surroundings.

I didn't know whether I'd be given one more Preview if a threat was approaching me again. I couldn't just trust that bastard.

I felt like I was slowly drying up while still alive.

The only place I could feel safe in was the Royal Class dormitory.

I was already familiar with the faces of the staff there, so it was a place where strangers would stand out to me.

Unfortunately, it was rather difficult for me to use my personal connections in that situation.

Even Ellen, who had been with me, thought that I was simply paranoid.

Not only had nothing happened, but I also didn't have any evidence, so even if I went around and said that there was someone who wanted to kill me, they'd just think the same.

I'd just end up getting treated like a madman after all the trouble I had caused all over the place.

It felt really shitty.

I really was in a situation where someone was trying to kill me, but to others, it just sounded like nonsense.

I needed proof, so I really needed to be attacked by an assassin. However, it was unclear whether I would survive that or not.

Of course, I could forcibly ask for help from Bertus, Charlotte, or Temple, but if I did that, they would probably take measures to stop me from leaving Temple.

If that were to happen, I wouldn't be able to make use of my strongest card.

I also had allies that only I could control.

I sent a letter out of Temple. It was too dangerous to go out in person because I had yet to find anything out.

* * *

A few days later…

Something knocked on my window.

—A bird.

It pecked my window as if it had some business with me.

When I opened the window, the little bird flew into my room and closed the curtains.

The time before, he'd disguised himself as a maid, but that time, he was a bird.

As the small bird chirped, its appearance turned into that of a graceful maid wearing a dress.

"Your Highness, it has been a while."

It was Sarkegaar.

I had sent the message to Loyar, who was at the Rotary Gang's headquarters, with the following orders in it: "Send Sarkegaar to Temple." I had written it in a secret code we had agreed upon beforehand, and so Sarkegaar arrived in front of me.

I didn't think I was a good leader.

To put it bluntly, I favored some of my subordinates over others. Not for business-related reasons but personal ones.

I was literally a perfect example of the direct opposite of a boss.

I tended to go visit Eleris for no other reason than to chat about my Temple life with her. She was a very good listener.

Though I did visit Loyar for more work-related reasons.

On the other hand, I rarely saw Sarkegaar, who worked under the pseudonym of ‘Count Argon Ponteus’. I didn't even know where Sarkegaar lived.

And his tension was always so high. Additionally, I felt like he would end up noticing that I didn't actually intend to rebuild the Demon Realm if I got more involved with him, so I tried to put distance between us.

So that was why it had been so long since I last saw Sarkegaar. Of course, although we were in my private room, we were still in Temple, so I didn't want to say anything unnecessary.

"I knew that you were doing exceedingly well. For you to already have taken over the transportation system of the Imperial Capital—"

"Enough."

"Eep."

I interrupted him.

It's been a long while since I’d seen him, and he was already babbling about useless things. He seemed to be very elated that I’d called him.

"Your Highness, for your sake, I would even go through the pits of hell. You can order anything of me."

I would have liked it if he didn't say that in such a beautiful and gentle voice.

“I don't want you to go to the pits of hell, but I might get sent there soon."

“…What do you mean, your Highness?"

"I think someone is trying to kill me."

"Are you saying there is a group of vagrants planning such things in this world?!"

His tone of voice was very low, and he spoke very violently, but in the end, he still seemed rather cute in his appearance.

"If you say the word, I will tear them limb from limb and hang them from the gates for daring to plan to kill the heir of the Demon Realm…”

"Why would you do this when we're in the Imperial Capital?"

I then told Sarkwgaar, who was more than livid over the fact that my life was being threatened, the details of the incident—even what happened before and how I managed to make so many enemies.

“Well, in that case, does Your Highness mean that you don't know who is threatening your life?"

“Yes, but I'm sure that there is someone. I have a very strong feeling that it's like that."

"Intuition… amazing intuition is something all great monarchs have. If it's Your Highness’s feeling, then I'm sure it's accurate. I'll make sure to find the assassin and his contractor, Your Highness."

It sure was nice to have someone who unconditionally trusted me.

I hadn’t called him because I needed his power, but I’d called him because he needed to act as a messenger to contact the others outside.

Count Argon Ponteus might be quite recognizable in his own right, but I still had other groups.

“Tell Eleris and Loyar about my situation. Also, contact the Thieves' Guild. They might know which assassin organization was behind this."

“Yes, everyone shall work together to corner the evil forces that tried to kill Your Highness."

Well…

By human standards, if they tried to kill the Prince of the Demon Realm, they wouldn't be considered evil, rather, they would be seen as heroes of mankind.

Sarkegaar was on my side, so that was why he could say things like that.

* * *

My connections in Temple wouldn't believe my words and said they weren’t credible enough, so I had to do what I could with those on my side.

Things would have been a lot easier if the assassin had attacked me that day.

—It was so frustrating that I even started to think like that.

If that happened, I would have been able to gather up all of my allies to look for the assassin.

It was also possible that the assassin wasn't sent from an organization but was just a single individual who had a grudge against me. In that case, it would be pretty hard to locate them.

It wasn't like I didn't have a list of suspects in my mind.

However, there were just too many.

There weren't just one or two people who held a grudge against me.

Therefore, I had no choice but to investigate step by step.

After checking every possibility, I would be able to find the culprit by process of elimination.

CHAPTER 249

I didn’t want things to boil over, so I kept my mouth shut at Temple.

Ellen was the only one aware that my life was being threatened by assassins, and she didn't even believe me.

I had no other choice but to continue my Temple life with my nerves constantly on edge.

“Aren't you acting quite strange these days?"

Liana spoke up as she looked at me on our way back from supernatural power classes.

On days I had classes related to supernatural powers, I tended to go back with Liana. Heinrich was also part of our classes, but Lana seemed to avoid him after they had some conflict.

“What?"

“It's true that you have a really dirty personality, but it's even worse than usual lately. Is there something going on? Did you have a fight with Ellen? No, that doesn’t seem to be it."

“It's nothing like that."

I had been on edge those past few days, so it seemed the phrase 'something serious happened' was etched on my face.

…My life was being threatened, but I couldn't tell her that.

I tried to think of a different explanation.

“I feel like I’ve made too many enemies recently."

I tried to just vaguely approximate my troubles because she wouldn't believe me if I

told her the truth.

“What are you saying all of a sudden?"

“There are more people than I could have imagined holding a grudge against me due to the incident with the Orbis Class, but there are just as many such people inside of Temple as outside, which is why I've been a bit on edge—I'm worried that something may happen."

“Wow, you actually care about those things? I'm amazed that you even consider those kinds of things."

Liana’s eyes widened and she shook her head.

Girl… I’m really not in the mood to deal with your antics right now.

Wait, wouldn't that electric girl be able to perform near-instant auto-self-defense if she were threatened?

‘Should I just stick around Liana for a while?’

…No, if I tried to stick to her, I'd just get rejected with her saying I was being rude. Liana smiled softly and poked my side.

“What? Do you think someone wants to kill you?"

“Perhaps…”

“…Huh?"

“No, I'm not saying it's true, but there is a possibility. I don't know how those people might act."

“…Aren't you taking this too seriously?"

Lana's reaction wasn't any different from Ellen's.

“More than just one or two people will be affected if this incident causes the Orbis Class to permanently close. Taking that into consideration, more than just one or two people would hold a grudge against me.

“Well… that's true."

However, Liana tilted her head at my words.

“By the way, I don't think that the Orbis Class would actually get closed down because of something like this."

Liana seemed to be absolutely convinced of that.

“On what grounds?"

“The special classes were created to nurture exceptionally talented individuals. As long as the results are good, it doesn't really matter if the class has some internal problems. As long as their goal of producing amazing talents is achieved, everything else can be overlooked."

It was exactly what Mr. Epinhajser said during the disciplinary committee meeting.

Mr. Epinhauser said that, regardless of whether I had a good personality or not, they had to let me off because I was an excellent talent that should be further nurtured because that was Temple's goal.

So, in that context, it was also true that the Orbis Class managed to produce a lot of exceptional individuals as well, even if there was a great deal of violence between seniors and juniors that even got encouraged by the teachers.

That was why the Orbis Class couldn't be closed down.

They might not even weed out any of its members or teachers.

Temple's vice chancellor, Assyrian Walken, also seemed to have already figured out the Orbis Class’s problems.

Contrary to my expectations, they might take no special actions against the Orbis Class. Investigations were going on even at that moment, but after some time passed, they might just gloss over the incident as if everything had been resolved already.

Of course, there would be students who'd get punished, and some faculty members might be replaced, but Liana seemed to think that they wouldn't come to the decision to close the Orbis Class.

The more I listened, the more I felt that she was right.

“So don't think of useless things and pull those kinds of faces, you punk. It's uncomfortable."

She only could talk like that because she didn't know my circumstances, but seeing Liana grin like that felt reassuring for some reason.

She felt somewhat reliable in a different way from Ellen.

As soon as I returned to the Royal Class dormitory, I started to wonder whether Liana's clumsiness was some kind of curse.

“Orbis Class will be closed down!"

Harriet delivered that huge news to me and Liana as soon as we got back.

We looked at each other blankly.

"…”

“Huh, well… Is that how it turned out…?"

Liana scratched her cheek with her index finger, wearing quite a stupid expression.

Didn't that go far beyond clumsiness? Didn't she actually have some kind of curse that made the opposite of what she said happen?

* * *

Class closure…

Orbis Class was one of Temple's flagships and one of two special classes, and even though it was deliberately created to motivate the Royal Class students to improve, it had also produced a great number of excellent individuals.

As Liana said, they were a group that flawlessly carried out their purpose even though they had some internal problems.

No matter how serious their internal problems were, I was convinced that they

wouldn't close down the Orbis Class.

"They're closing it down? Are you sure?"

Harriet nodded her head wildly with a blank expression on her face at Lana's words. She looked really flustered as if she never expected things to turn out like that.

"That seemed to be the decision they came to during the meeting presided over by the chancellor. I don't know the details, but Orbis will be completely closed down for now."

While it didn't seem like it at first, in the end, those results were to be expected.

An inflection point in history had occurred. In a way, it was only natural that the Orbis Class would get closed down. Did so many problems come up after they dug into the Orbis Class's problems that they had no other choice but to close it?

Was it even to the point that they had to deny their overall goal of nurturing talented individuals?

The Orbis Class was an annex to the Royal Class, to put it bluntly.

Its disappearance was bound to affect the Royal Class as well.

"Then what will happen to the students who attended it?"

"I don't really know, but… won't they just go to other schools?"

The details weren't clear yet.

The Orbis Class had been closed.

What I had done caused such extreme change.

"Hey… aren't you in really big trouble?"

* * *

Liana, who had just told me to relax because the Orbis Class wouldn't be closed down, seemed to realize the seriousness of the situation.

Since the situation had reached that point, there could be a lot of people holding a grudge against me that would do whatever it took to get revenge.

"You… just tell me when you need to go somewhere."

Liana looked at me anxiously.

As things had turned out like that, she seemed to take the idea that my life could be in danger seriously.

-*Bzzt!*

Liana let an electric spark fly from the tip of her finger.

“I can fry quite a few people with this."

It seemed like Liana intended to escort me whenever I needed it.

A Duke's daughter became my bodyguard.

Regardless of everything else, it did feel kind of good.

* * *

The fact that the Orbis Class actually closed down meant that I inevitably made a lot of enemies—they could be the seniors of the Orbis Class or the teachers.

Since I ended up destroying the whole hive by simply poking at it, the bees who had lost their nest would focus their hatred on me and try to sting me however they could.

…So I acted a bit more cautiously.

I didn't go anywhere alone.

I didn't even step a foot out of the dormitory after classes. Either Ellen or Liana were always by my side because they both knew that I was in danger.

Ellen's abilities were reassuring, but the sense of security I got from Liana was greater.

Liana, who could let out an electric shock in a radius as big as her ability allowed her to at any time and place, was able to react to any unexpected surprises within her range.

No matter what happened, the class closure was an unexpected event.

“Let's talk for a second, Reinhardt."

Bertus suddenly wanted to talk to me.

* * *

“Don't mess around for a while starting now."

Bertus, who had called me, spoke calmly as he drank his black tea.

It seemed like Saviolin Turner was right in saying that I had made too many enemies. Bertis brought that up even though I didn't say anything.

"Since the class actually ended up being closed down, there are many people who have suffered great damages from your actions, groups and individuals both. And even if they know that you aren't the real cause of all this, they most certainly know that the trigger was you. So, if you jump around anymore, this won't just end up with you tripping on a stone. Rather, it’ll be more like falling off a cliff."

"…”

Things just blew up while I was trying to prevent the case of Ender Wilton and solve the problems of the Orbis Class.

“You'll be fine as long as you stay in the Royal Class's dormitory and don't do anything special."

His words meant that I shouldn't cause any more trouble. Of course, I didn't intend to just wander around all over the place in that situation.

However, what Bertus said seemed a little strange.

I'd be fine?

I felt a sense of incongruity emanating from those words.

So did that mean others could also be in danger? Bertus smiled, seeming as if he had noticed my thoughts.

“I mean, people generally tend to dislike enemies from within more than ones from without."

Whistleblowers.

“Lilka Aaron…?”

"Even if she doesn't get killed right now, don't you think she might get expelled and then killed?"

I shot the first shot at the Orbis Class, leading to its collapse, however, Lilka Aaron's whistleblowing was the decisive blow.

I was able to be put under the Imperial Prince's, Princess's, and countless other people's protection, Lilka, on the other hand, wasn't in such a position.

She was in a much more dangerous spot.

She risked becoming a whistleblower just to eliminate all those absurdities.

As a result, many problems had been uncovered, however, rather than fixing them, the Orbis Class sank with them.

Therefore, someone had to be blamed for all the damages caused as well as shoulder all the resulting anger. Those people would undoubtedly be after me, but they certainly wouldn't let Lilka, who had betrayed the Orbis Class, go unnoticed.

“What's going to happen…?"

“Temple is protecting them at the moment, but that can't go on forever. They might get assigned to different classes as the Orbis Class is torn apart. By the way, a gap is bound to appear and they can’t be kept safe forever, either."

"…”

"I mean, there was also a case of an Imperial Princess getting kidnapped from Emperatos, right?"

There was no such thing as an absolutely safe place.

—Just like how Sarkegaar managed to kidnap the princess.

However, if they wanted to kill Lilka Aaron, they could do that whenever they wanted.

Bertus's cold expression seemed especially cold that day.

* * *

It wasn't enough to worry about my own life, I also had to worry about Lilka's. I didn't even know who was after my life at the moment.

While it was Lilka Aaron who acted as a whistleblower first, in the end, all of the first-year Orbis Class students decided to take collective action.

So if one looked at the bigger picture, all those students' lives were in immediate danger.

As long as they went through with the class closure, the damage dealt would be irreversible, and the students of the Orbis Class would be scattered. Temple couldn't protect all of them forever.

Bertus helped me, but he didn't intend to do the same for Lilka Aaron nor did he have any reason to.

I sat at my desk after I returned to my private room.

It was past our bedtime, but I couldn't sleep.

Not everything would just turn out like I thought it would.

Even if they weren't able to get rid of those absurdities, I told them to at least call them out.

They were simply fed up with the bullshit, so they revealed Orbis Class's absurdities

to the world.

As such, the school got shut down.

However, I wasn't able to predict the amount of anger that would arise from that.

I didn't think that it would lead to people trying to kill me and others.

It was my failure for not realizing just how rotten a place the Orbis Class actually was.

If I stayed low and held my breath inside the Royal Class's dormitory, I would be safe.

…But until when?

I didn’t think those who were after me would have their attentions wane just because of one or two days passing.

Would Lilka be in danger in the near future?

If she died, while I wouldn't have killed her directly, my actions would’ve led to her death.

I thought the matter would end just by identifying the assassin who was after me. While that was also a serious problem, I didn't think it was one that I couldn't solve.

However, in my situation, there were just too many suspects.

With no idea just who the hell was trying to kill me, it was clear that there were several people like that.

Just what was I supposed to do?

I didn't know. I felt like my head was clogged up.

[Writer's Advice] - 150 Points

It was a skill I had forgotten about for a while.

The Preview that suddenly heralded my death made me able to avoid it.

Writer's Advice had also completely changed my life.

Didn't everything start after I met Eleris due to Writer's Advice?

When I didn't know what to do, Writer's Advice would give me unpredictable but somewhat clear instructions.

Clear and vague advice…

Clear advice dictated concrete actions…

Vague advice would throw some abstract words at you.

Vague advice was hard to understand, but it was likely safe if understood correctly.

Clear advice would often involve taking bigger risks…

And both had the potential to have absolutely good outcomes but also very bad ones. Usually, both good and bad outcomes would appear simultaneously.

The last time I used it, I couldn't make heads or tails of the vague advice. It wasn't until after the situation blew up in my face that I understood what it meant.

However, I could still use the Writer's Advice with 150 points.

Since I still had a lot of achievement points, I could listen to both the clear and vague advice.

[Vague Writer's Advice]

[Why was the Orbis Class shut down?]

I knew it…

I was again not sure what that meant.

The shutdown of the Orbis Class was decided in a meeting presided over by the president. There was a good chance that the Imperial Family also had some influence on the decision.

It was shut down because the problems the Orbis Class had were bigger than Temple's main purpose—to nurture talented students. That had to mean that there was more to it than that.

I couldn't know at that point.

Bertus or Charlotte would probably know the details.

I was going to look at the clear advice as well anyway.

[Clear Writer's Advice]

[Meet Oscar de Gardias alone.]

Oscar de Gardias…

I had a hunch that his name would pop up.

CHAPTER 250

Meeting Oscar de Gardias alone…

I decided to first think about how it could end.

If that advice could bring me both good and bad outcomes, then meeting Oscar would be the right direction, but it would be connected with a lot of risks.

He was bound to be connected to the assassination to some extent.

When Lilka became a whistleblower during the disciplinary committee meeting, rather than being taken aback, he seemed to think that things had taken an interesting turn.

He should have noticed that our lives would be threatened by assassination attempts or that we might actually end up dying.

Was Oscar the one who personally instigated the assassination?

I didn't think so.

Was he related to those behind the assassination?

That had a fairly high possibility of being true.

Did Oscar know that the Orbis Class would be shut down during the committee meeting?

I didn't know.

However, it seemed clear that I had to meet with Oscar to overcome that situation.

We weren’t able to get along from the start, so even if we met up again, I doubt that either of us had anything good to say to the other.

Still, in order to somehow overcome that assassination situation, I had to meet that

guy.

But he was, objectively speaking, a lot stronger than me. If he was serious, he could beat me to death with his bare hands.

Even though I hadn't followed the advice yet, it was clear that I had to take on a huge risk if I did.

The clear Writer's Advice even added the condition of meeting him 'alone'.

That meant that I wouldn't be able to have a proper conversation with Oscar if I was accompanied by Ellen, Liana, or anyone else.

If that advice only led to bad outcomes, Oscar would kill me the moment I stepped before him.

The clear Writer's Advice didn't leave me guessing, it was like a test of courage.

I had to go to places or do things that might lead to my death.

I had no idea how Oscar would treat me if I actually met up with him alone, so I had no choice but to pursue the vague advice first.

The Orbis Class's closure…

I had to know the real reason behind it.

* * *

The next day…

I had already gotten advice from Bertus, so I went to see Charlotte.

Charlotte would always work out with Scarlett around dawn, so I went to meet them early in the morning.

After a little extra exercise, I managed to find Scarlett in one of Temple's parks.

"Oh, Reinhardt. Good morning."

She looked at me and bowed her head.

“Oh, hey. What about Charlotte?"

We hadn’t really gotten closer after taking that swordsmanship class together, but I ended up getting used to her overly polite actions.

However, I couldn't see Charlotte anywhere near Scarlett.

Weren't they always exercising together at dawn? Well, not always, but I thought that I had seen them around from time to time.

“Ah. Her Highness the Imperial Princess… is not here."

“Is that so? Did she give up?"

Even though she was lacking in stamina, she worked out anyway, although she didn't really show any improvement. It wasn't just the aftermath of having been imprisoned in the Demon King's Castle, it looked clear that Charlotte was originally physically weak.

“No, she just can't do any training at dawn because she commutes to school from the Imperial Castle these days."

She commuted to school?

That was the first time I heard of that. However, while I only rarely saw her at the dorms because we had different classes, it certainly had been a while since I last saw her there.

“Out of the blue?"

“It has only been a few days. She has a lot of work to do…”

"Hmm… Well, I guess so."

There were probably a lot of problems the Orbis Class incident had caused, and Bertus and Charlotte would commute to school from the Imperial Castle rather than stay in the dormitories when something concerning the Imperial Family happened, so that wasn't particularly strange.

That being said, that meant that she was still in the Imperial Castle, but fortunately, I had classes that overlapped with Charlotte's that day, so I could meet up with her after class to talk.

Fortunately, it was Thursday.

We had integrated classes on that day, so Charlotte would have her classes in the next room.

After class, I managed to grab Charlotte, who was about to leave Temple and not return to the dorms.

“Yes, Reinhardt?"

Charlotte stopped in her tracks when I called out to her.

However, she seemed far too relaxed.

Was she really busy?

When I asked her if she could spare a minute, she nodded and told me that she had some time.

“I don't think I have time for tea, but I can spare some time to talk."

Charlotte and I sat next to each other on a nearby park bench.

When I asked her my question, she just shook her head.

“You want to know why the Orbis Class was shut down?"

“Yeah."

“That's it?"

“Yeah, I thought the class wouldn’t get closed down, so I was wondering if there was any other reason other than the incident behind it.”

Charlotte looked at me.

“No. Seeing that you’re digging around about this, aren’t you actually just going to cause trouble again?”

Ah, the lament of the boy who cried wolf.

I was actually doing it because I had to do something, but I didn’t plan on telling her at all.

“Just stay in the dormitory. You know that it’s dangerous to cause any more trouble now, right?”

Charlotte said the same thing as Bertus.

Those two… if one overlooked some things, they really seemed similar to each other. Sometimes I even wondered if they weren’t actually twins.

However, they were actually different people.

“It’s really not such a big deal. I’m just curious because it’s something I’m involved with.”

“Hmm…”

Charlotte crossed her arms and looked at me as if she felt troubled.

“There isn’t some complicated reason, the people involved just overreacted.”

“What do you mean by ‘overreacted’?”

"A large number of teachers sent in their resignations, and a significant number of senior students also decided to drop out. In other words, they ran away before they could even get punished. More than half of the teachers and students simply disappeared.”

“…Like a strike?”

“…Correct."

Charlotte smiled softly.

"It's a united action as if they want to say something like 'If you mess with us, you have to be prepared for the Orbis Class to be completely destroyed.' They probably thought we would go crawling and begging them to come back, saying that we would let this all go."

"…"

Driven into a corner, the teachers and senior students of the Orbis Class decided to take collective action. It was more or less a statement like 'The class might collapse, are you really okay with that?'

They were probably bluffing. Charlotte's eyes seemed cold as she spoke about the matter.

"That is a direct challenge to the Imperial Family."

"How dare they, who were supported by the Empire, led peaceful lives while enjoying education and meals provided by the Empire, slept in beds provided by the Empire, and used the money they received from the Empire, try to negotiate with the Empire in such a disrespectful manner?"

It seemed like the collective action by the Orbis Class faculty and students went against the Imperial Family's wishes and not Temple headquarters.

"So that is why the decision was made to throw it all away. They were too arrogant. The Orbis Class shall neither exist anymore nor ever exist again."

The cornered mouse tried to bite the cat, but the cat killed it. Rather than having to endure change or punishment, they risked the entire Orbis Class, and the Imperial Family took that action as a challenge against their authority.

So the Orbis Class disappeared through an Imperial Decree.

Was it because they were too agitated that they ended up getting driven into a corner? The Orbis Class ended up touching something they shouldn't have.

"However, their actions themselves were, in fact, not a crime, so we won't punish them for it. On the other hand, it should be taken into consideration that we shall show no leniency regarding the numerous acts of coercion and assault committed within the confines of the Orbis Class that will come to light in the future."

So basically ‘Sure, quit if you don’t want to work, or drop out if you don’t want to study here.’

The shutdown of the Orbis Class was only caused because they tried to fight against something they should have never offended.

Originally, Temple never considered shutting down the school, but they ended up taking such extreme measures for the crime of insulting the Imperial Family.

I found out why the Orbis Class had been shut down.

So… what did it mean?

What was the connection between finding out who was behind the assassination and the Orbis Class’s self-destruction?

-*Clap!*

“Arg!”

I was thinking when Charlotte suddenly hit me on my back.

“You look like you’re about to do something again. Am I right?”

“No, I didn’t even say anything like that, right?”

"Every time I see you thinking hard about something, you’re about to cause some trouble. It’s obvious. Stay in Temple, okay? No, don’t even leave the dormitory.”

"B-but I still have to take my classes!”

"Who told you not to go to class? Just don’t wander around in weird places outside of class! Look at you playing dumb with me even though you know full well what I mean! Anyway, I mean it.”

Even though she said she didn’t have much time, Charlotte ended up grabbing me and nagging me, almost going on with a long monologue.

A person who would get nagged by a princess…

I mean, wasn't that also quite a unique position to be in?

I glanced at the nagging girl, thinking that CHarlotte might actually hit me again if she thought that I was deep in thought again.

After going off on me for a while, Charlotte sighed.

"Reinhardt…"

"…Don't you think I've been scolded enough already? What else do you want to say?"

Her expression was slightly more subtle, different from when she was nagging me.

"Don't cause any trouble. I'm saying this because I'm genuinely concerned. That's how it is now and how it will be in the future."

Somehow, Charlotte's expression looked sad.

She said that she was busy. Was there something going on?

"Understood?"

Charlotte waited for an answer.

"I'm taking my leave. I'm sorry. I'd like to talk more, but I'm busy."

"…When will you be back in the dorms?"

The words I brought out in that situation where my life was on the line seemed pretty pathetic.

"Hm… If you don't cause any trouble, I might be able to come back right away."

Charlotte narrowed her eyes as she said that.

For some reason, I wasn't able to take my eyes off of Charlotte's back as she left the campus with light steps.

I watched her for quite some time.

* * *

The vague Writer's Advice was still incomprehensible to me in the end.

What conclusion could I draw from the fact that the Orbis Class was shut down due to butting heads with the Imperial Family?

We weren't in a democratic society. The Imperial Family ruled over everything in the Empire. Even in Temple, which was run with the enormous support of the Imperial Family, there was no way that threats against the Imperial Family would work.

So, in the end, the only thing left was the clear advice.

I had to meet up with Oscar alone.

However, no matter how I looked at it, that was a very risky endeavor. I might be able to get a clue from that meeting, but it was very likely that the outcome would be incredibly bad.

The risk was far too great. How could I win in a real fight against Oscar, who could use Magic Body Strengthening? Even if I ambushed him with the Flame of Tuesday and the protection bracelet equipped, it still looked bad.

Lilka Aaron's situation was also a problem, but I couldn't just hold my breath like that.

I couldn't just stay holed up in Temple forever, either.

For the moment, I decided to wait for more information. There might be something I had missed or didn't know yet, after all.

* * *

A few days later, Sarkegaar paid me a visit.

"I have been given a list of groups that engage in assassination."

It was the right move to go through the Thieves' Guild to get information about the

underworld. Sarkegaar wrote down the names of several groups in my notebook—they were all new organizations.

“Obviously, this isn’t a list of all active assassins, and there are also some hidden organizations. However, I infiltrated those that are active in the Imperial Capital and was able to confirm that there hadn’t been any assassination requests regarding Your Highness.”

I couldn’t help but feel uncomfortable with those words.

There were a total of five organizations that made their money through contract killings in the Imperial Capital, and within that short amount of time, Sarkegaar had already infiltrated them and finished his information gathering.

That bastard… I didn’t really care before, but just how capable was he?

Well, he even managed to kidnap the Imperial Princess from the Castle. Just as Loyar and Eleris were highly skilled, Sarkegaar was also bound to be outstanding in his field.

When I thought of it, there were actually five whole organizations specialized in contract killings.

I felt my knees getting soft.

“There wouldn’t be any assassination attempts from groups from other regions… right?”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

Then that meant that the person who was aiming for me actually tried doing it themselves, or it was someone who spontaneously tried to stab me in the back while overcome with hatred…

I seriously wished I could see the culprit's face using Preview, but I was already grateful enough that this scammer saved me when I was about to die.

I had to do the next steps myself.

The assassins and contract killers were clean.

In the end, everything led up to me meeting up with Oscar…

It would be dangerous if I went alone, but what the hell…?

“Well, I shall take my leave now.”

“Ah, yes. Good job.”

Sarkegaar transformed from his maid form into his sparrow form, which he also used to enter the place.

“Ah, wait, wait!”

Then I waved my hands towards Sarkegaar, who was about to fly away.

-Tweet?

Sarkegaar, in sparrow form, tilted his head as if asking what was the matter.

“Could you maybe go with me somewhere for a bit?”

-Tweet!

Sarkegaar was able to transform into a non-human form whenever he wanted.

…So I was able to go meet Oscar alone while not actually being alone.

The sparrow was jumping, showing its enthusiasm with its whole body. Was he that excited that I needed him?

In the end, while his purpose was a little problematic, there was no one more loyal than him.

I didn’t even do anything for him.

I felt kind of sorry for no reason.



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